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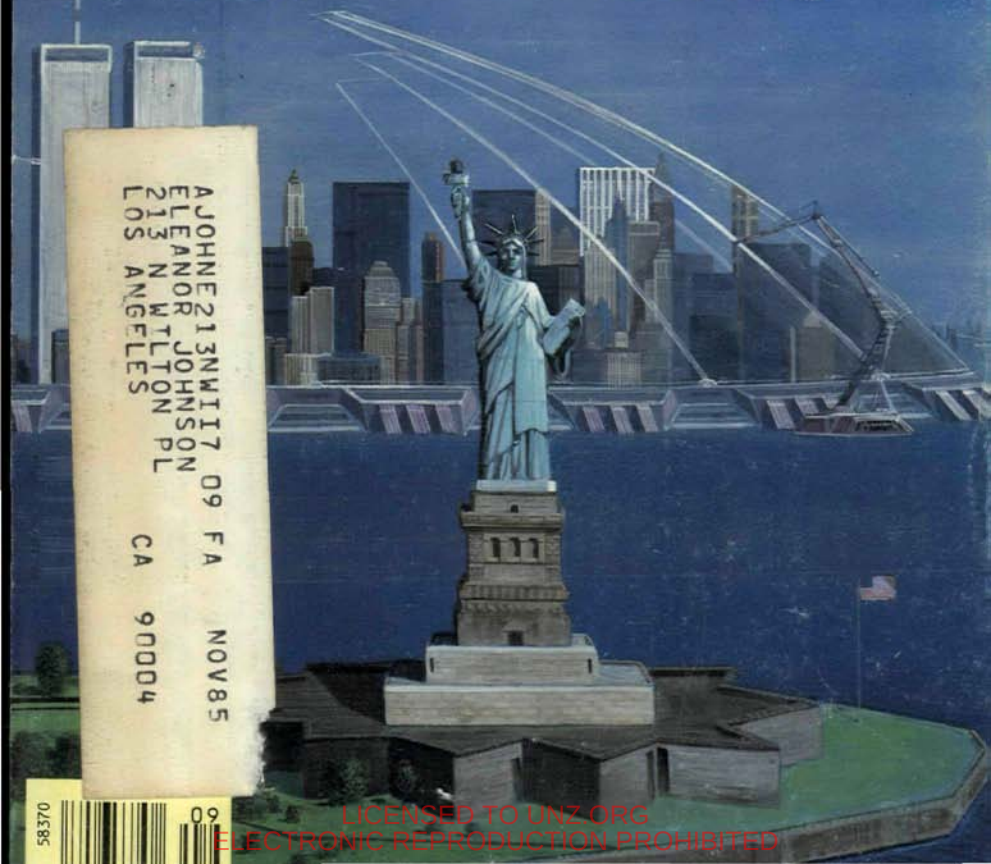

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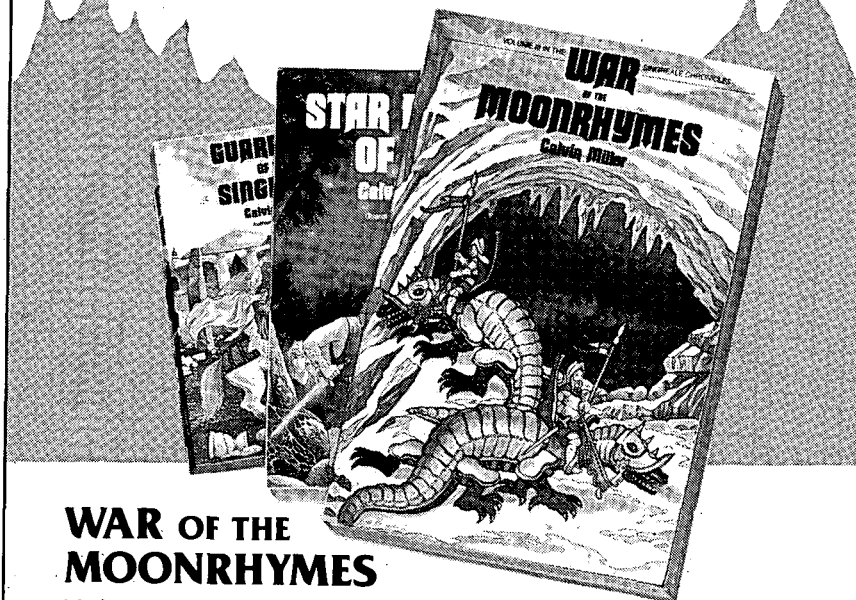

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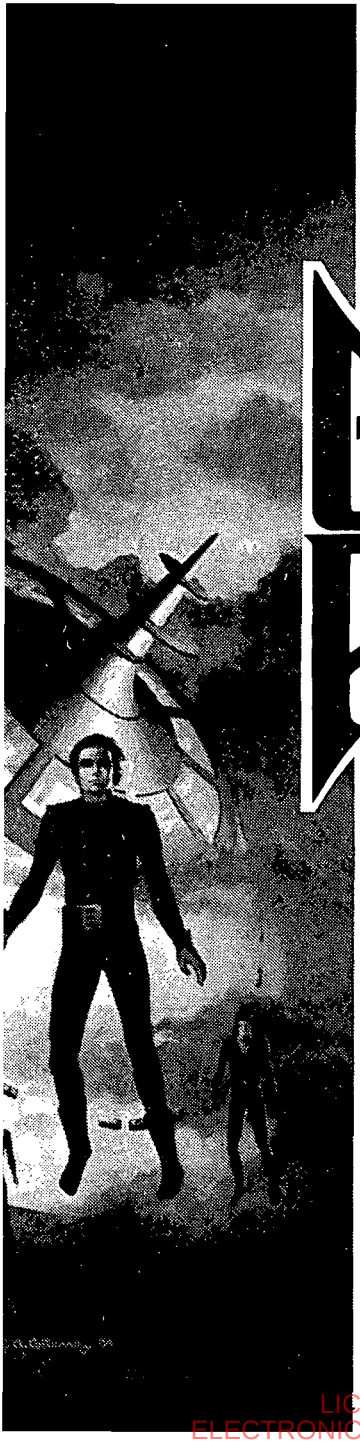

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New books from Frederik Pohl include HEECHEE RENDEZVOUS, recently published by Del Rey, and a sequel to the famous THE SPACE MERCHANTS titled THE MERCHANT'S WAR, to be published in 1985 by St. Martin's. Meanwhile, here is Mr. Pohl with another ("The Greening of Bed-Stuy," July 1984) fine novella about a future New York City and the doming of Manhattan island.

The Blister

BY

FREDERIK POHL

I

The union guy's name was Ella Jennalec, and she wasn't a guy. Probably at least one of her grandparents had been black. She was short and she was hefty, but the weight was where it needed to be. She wasn't young. She had to be easing upon forty, which made her a good dozen years older than John Fitzgerald Kennedy Bratislaw III. So he thought, straightening up for a better view, although he could almost feel his wife's eyes boring into his back, because he was thinking that there was a lot of mileage left in some of those older models.

Roar from the foreman: "You, Bratislaw! Keep your fucking mind on the fucking job!" Bratislaw grunted and shifted position a little as the winch took a little more strain on the cable, and the rest of the crew leaned muscle against the cold, wet wind. All of them were sneaking looks at the same thing — not at the cable that curved up to the steelwork over Battery Park, but at the union guy, standing on top of the deadweight and hassling with an engineer from the contractors. She wasn't dressed for the weather, and the crew appreciated that; jeans hugged her hips lovingly, and so did their eyes.

The diesel blatted, the winch turned, the ratchet thudded, the foreman yelled: "God damn it, I said watch it! You, Carmen! Take the hand lever in case it slips!" The old winchman looked up and nodded. He changed places with Bratislaw, the two of them sliding as they moved. The steel-toed shoes didn't grip the surface, and the wind was blowing — no, it was pouring — down the Hud-

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son Valley. Almost all of it seemed to be funneled right to the little artificial island between Ellis and Governor's where the cable crew was putting stress on the line. You would expect that by nearly April things would be warming up a little. They weren't. The dirty gray waves broke into dirty gray foam that froze the crew as it splashed them. And the splashes stank.

"Watch it!"

The ratchet clicked over and hesitated before catching, and the whole crew yelled and scrambled for footing. But it was all right, and the crew boss, studying his strain gauges, ordered them to hold up for a minute. Ella Jennalec glanced down at the crew with a thumb and a grin, and went back to arguing bonus rates with the construction company's man.

The crew including Bratislaw — his friends called him Jeff, short for JFK —was reeling the cable ends sunk into the deadfall to the spools of cable that, before long, would be pulled up the master line to the truncated top of the old World Trade Center, a kilometer and a half away and nearly half a kilometer straight up. It was hard work. Donkey work. Machines made it possible, but not easy. It took muscles. It took big men like Bratislaw and Carmen, and once in a while a big woman like Merrimee, the old black grandmother. About a quarter of the crew wound up with a hernia after a year or two. For that kind of work Jeff Bratislaw was well prepared. He had spent his childhood on a dying Wisconsin dairy farm. It accustomed him to hard physical work in bad weather, because the cows had to be fed whether it was balmy June or blizzard time. When the warming winds had scoured the plains dry, he came to New York, and found the hardest work in the city was child's play after the herds.

"Take another notch," the gang boss ordered, and the winchman started up the diesel.

The alloy-steel cable would have to stand a strain of more than two hundred kilograms to the square centimeter and would have to stay exposed to the outside weather for fifty years. It was big and tough. Each strand of the cable had been frayed out, so that it looked like a steel fright wig. The individual strands were fed into a coupler, which consisted of a squat cylindrical steel barrel, with spikes projecting from a diaphragm inside. Once both cables had been matched in the coupler, it was Bratislaw's job to hold the ends in contact while the linkup crew tightened down the cylinder. Then, as the coupler began to take the strain from the main length of master line, to ease up on the clamps just enough to let the cable pull itself together. Hard work, yes, and dirty; but it was $33.50 an hour, and you didn't get that on a played-out dairy farm in Wisconsin.

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But it wasn't enough for Heidi to quit working and have a baby on, and Bratislaw knew that very well because Heidi had pointed it out to him every day for the past two months.

So, as soon as the foreman nodded that all was secured for the moment, while the engineers argued over the strain-gauge readings, Bratislaw waved at his union rep. "Ella? I got to talk to you a minute."

She nodded and winked, and went right back to the hassle with the guys from the construction company. Whatever that was. Bratislaw leaned forward and spat into the cold bay, and pulled his pea jacket closer around him.

There was always a hassle. There always would be a hassle, for the next twenty years, he bet. When the Blister was built, it would cover almost all of the island of Manhattan, and they said it would save sixty skintillion cubic feet of natural gas every year. Probably it would. But it was going to cost plenty of gas every day of every one of those years, because every union in the city was going to have to take some and give some, and most of all change some. Doming the city was going to change the way the city worked. Sanitation men wouldn't use trucks anymore. Firemen were going to have a vertical city to deal with. Cops wouldn't have squad cars. Nobody else would have cars, either, because public transportation would be the only way to go, and a lot of the ways would be up and down; the transit workers and the elevator operators were squabbling that one out now, which was why Jeff had had to climb twenty-six flights to get to bed last night. But most of all and right now, it was a problem for the construction unions, because no job like this had even been done anywhere before. Because what was it that they were doing? The skeleton of the dome was braced by cables — bridges had cables — so the old International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Iron Workers filed a claim. But it was also like putting up a big auditorium dome, so Building, Concrete, Excavating and Common Laborers took an interest. And the artificial islands had to be built on caissons, so here came the Compressed Air Workers. And the final product would be transparent, so there were the Glaziers; and the Blasters, Drillers and Miners; and the Stationary Engineers. And, because a few of the tallest skyscrapers at the fringes had to come down or be chopped shorter, the House Wreckers. And because of all the servomachinery, the Machinists and Aerospace Workers —and about a hundred more. And then the Teamsters came in and offered to represent them all; and when you thought it out, Ella Jennalec's bunch had saved everybody a lot of headaches by putting together the One Big Union merger. The city liked it,

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because they had only one union to deal with. The builders liked it, because the city did most of the dealing. The workers liked it, because they didn't have to worry about which union to join; in fact, everybody liked it — with the possible exceptions of the ABS and O.A.W., the C.A.W., the Glaziers, the Blasters, and the Teamsters. They hadn't liked it at all, but they had been helped to get used to it through the hard work of some of the middle-management types like Ella Jennalec's associate, standing up there on the deadweight with her and the engineers. His name was Tiny, and he was taller than Jeff Bratislaw, and heavier, and his scarred knuckles said he was probably better in other respects, too. In the table of organization of the new Elevated Structures, Tunnels & Approach Workers, he was listed as a clerk-typist. He probably might have been, once. But not anymore, with those hands.

"Take five," growled the gang boss as the engineers finished their battle with Ella and beckoned to him. Ella herself hopped down beside Bratislaw, catching herself with his arm as she hit the slippery concrete.

"How they hanging, stud?" she grinned. "You want to see me?"

"Yeah. I'm Jeff Bratislaw — you know, we mamboed at the New Year's dance at the local—"

"I remember. You move good, Jeff Bratislaw."

"Well, I need a better job than this. Thirty-three fifty won't make it anymore, and I was thinking about deckhand on one of those tugs that keep people away."

"Come on, Jeff! Not our jurisdiction; a good union brother ought to know that." The EST&A Workers owned all the jobs that touched any part of the dome itself or its outliers, but the harbor tugs were outside their law.

"Then demolition, maybe." He jerked his head toward the diminishing southern shaft of the World Trade Center. "I hear those guys get forty-eight bucks an hour, portal to portal."

"And some of them don't make it through the first hour, asshole," she said cheerfully. "You ever try to take apart a prestressed concrete girder? You got a wife, don't you? Why do you want to make her a widow?"

"I want to make her a mother, Ella, but to do that I need more dough."

"To do that," she grinned, "all you need is what you already got, and when we was mamboing, I noticed you got plenty."

"Yeah, but—"

"Yeah." She cut him off. "I ain't saying no, Jeff, but right now I got plenty of things to take care of. These jerks wanted to cut out hazard pay for your job, did you know that? And then there's that grand jury thing coming up. But listen, not demolition. Nobody knows where the tensioned cables are in those girders anymore. You ever seen a bomb go off?

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That's what it's like. I got twenty-two compensation cases right now from the top ten stories alone. And—"

She was stalling him, Bratislaw knew; but the stalling stopped.

Her hired muscle, Tiny, was edging her gradually toward the tied-up launch waiting to take them back to South Ferry; the engineers were listening frostily to explanations from the gang boss; no one was watching the winch. And the cable, stretching slowly, gave just enough of a fraction of a centimeter to make the ratchet slip one notch.

This time Carmen was watching the gang boss instead of his hand lever. The elasticity of the steel spun the geared-down hand drum a quarter turn for that one ratchet notch. The lever hurtled out of its socket.

Jeff Bratislaw heard the click and saw the drum begin to move. He dove for cover, sweeping Ella with him. Tiny, a fraction of a second later, jumped, too, but he was big and heavy for fast movement on the sleet-sprayed concrete. He fell sprawling, just as the hand lever flew a hundred meters through the stormy air before it splashed into the bay. Bratislaw was suddenly colder than the air around him. Two seconds earlier, he had been standing right in the path of that two-meter shaft of hard metal, and if that had struck his head, what would have been left of it, hard hat or none?

"The hell," Ella said shakily, getting up. "Maybe demolition's not so bad after all. Thanks, Bratislaw."

You took your chances when they came. "So what about a transfer?" he demanded.

But she wasn't looking at him; she was staring at Tiny, sprawled on the slick concrete and sobbing, with one leg bent in a way that legs didn't bend.

Everybody was yelling at everybody else, but they got together enough to gentle Tiny into the launch, even though he screamed when they lifted him. Ella hopped in after him. Before it pulled away, she lifted her face to call to Jeff Bratislaw: "Looks like there's a vacancy. Report to my apartment eight o'clock tomorrow morning. We'll try you out for a week, anyway."

II

The elevators were running — the day was staying good. As soon as Bratislaw got back to his apartment, he dropped his clothes in the bathroom and, stark-naked, padded to the kitchen to make dinner. There was a note fastened to the refrigerator door with a magnetic clip: *Not fish again, please?* A little heart was drawn below it for a signature.

Bratislaw considered his options, holding the freezer door open, and finally pulled out two large Salisbury steaks, part of the batch he had made the week before, each in its individu-

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al pouch. They were made out of 100 percent meat; hell, it was a day worth celebrating! He pulled out three large carrots and a couple of potatoes, then took an empty pouch out of the hardware drawer and put it on the drainboard. A pot of hot water went on the stove, and while it was coming to a boil, he put on the scraping gloves and rubbed the skins off the vegetables. They were nearly blemishless, city-grown in the big sand-trays that used reject hot water from the 14th Street power plant. He chopped them all into slices with the cleaver, and potatoes and carrots went together into the pouch, along with a chunk of butter and a sprinkling of salt, pepper, and dried parsley. He zipped up the pouch and dropped it into the boiling water, set the timer, and took his quick shower.

By the time he was out of the shower, it was time to put the frozen meat in the same pot. He reset the timer, shaved, pulled on slacks and a tunic, and had started mixing drinks when the bell rang.

Heidi didn't usually ring the bell; he peered through the peephole and saw a blurry female figure in a police uniform. "Hey there, Lucy," he said, opening the door; it was his wife's sister. "Didn't expect to see you tonight. You want to stay for dinner?" There was another steak in the freezer, and the vegetables, he calculated quickly, would stretch.

"I can't, Jeff. I won't even come in." But she did, just far enough to let him close the door. "I'm on duty, but I stopped off to see if you wanted to sign the petition now."

"What petition?" He knew, well enough; he just didn't want her to bring him down with talk about corruption in the city.

"For a citizen's grand jury to investigate the grand jury — you know! We talked about it Saturday night."

He gazed down at the sheet of paper — two short paragraphs and then at least fifty lines for citizens' signatures. But there were only two signatures on the page, and one of those was Lucy's own. "Well, I don't know, Lucy," he said. "I could get in trouble with this — so could you, you know. Specially if you're canvassing when you're on duty."

"I'm not *canvassing,* Jeff; I'm just dropping this off, and I had to be in the building anyway — it's part of my beat. Look, I'll just leave it for you and Heidi, O.K.? And I'll come by for it when I go off duty."

"See you later," he said, which was not a commitment. He didn't see any way out of it, though. Lucy was the do-gooder in the family, an honest cop, never took a nickel or an apple; and Heidi was too proud of her to turn her down on a thing like that. And if Heidi signed, he might as well sign himself; the people that would get upset about signing the petition wouldn't stop to consider whether both members of a family had signed

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— they would just make a little mark against the lease form, and another against the park permit, and another against the names of the Bratislaws wherever they appeared. He dropped the petition on the windowsill, staring out at the city. There were red laser lights flashing at the tops of the unfinished dome skeleton, to warn off aircraft, and it was drizzling again. It was a pretty city to look at. Why didn't people just leave it alone?

When he heard Heidi's key in the lock, he had dinner on the table. He greeted her with a kiss. "I got the job," he said.

"Aw, Jeff, that's great!" She was looking tired as she came in the door, but a smile broke through the fatigue. "Tell me about it." And then, when she took a better look at him: "Holy shit, what have you done to your face?"

He had not even known about the bruise until he was shaving. "Industrial accident," he said. "I fell. Now listen. I'm going to be assistant to the shop steward. White-collar work. I don't have to get into demolition, and I don't have to pull cable in the snow."

"And more money?"

Bratislaw hestitated. "Well, I don't exactly know what the money is yet."

She took a pull at the drink and then moved toward the dinner table. The fatigue was back on her face, along with a look of puzzlement. "Explain that to me, will you, Jeff?"

"The money's the least part of it," he said, dividing the pouches between their plates. "There's plenty of fringe benefits."

"Oh?"

"You know." He made up his mind to tell her; she would understand; she wasn't like her crazy sister. "When somebody wants to get a better job, you know? He comes to the union. And he pays a kind of — what would you call it? — a finder's fee to the guy who gets it for him."

"A kickback," she said, nodding. "You're going to be taking kickbacks."

"Heidi, you aren't going to give me a hard time, are you? That's the way the system works. You take kickbacks or you pay them — I just happen to think it's better to take them."

"Um." It wasn't agreement, but it wasn't an argument, either.

"So are we going to do it?" he pressed.

She chewed, regarding him. Neither of them had to say what "it" was, because "it" had been a major topic of conversation for the past three months — ever since they got the genetics lab reports that showed them both fully fertile and without any seriously worrisome defects. "Well, I'll tell you, old man," she said, "I imagine we are. But let's finish dinner first."

Heidi was always three times as long in the shower as Bratislaw, which was fine with him because the results

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were always worth it. While she was using up half their day's water allotment, he was putting the dishes in the washer, folding up the table, pulling out the bed. He stopped himself as he packed up the organic garbage for the chute ... the strike. So it would have to go into the freezer until they settled that one. He smoothed the pillows, turned down the sheets, got out of his clothes and into the dressing gown that was his signal for sexual intercourse — Heidi's was pajama tops without the bottoms — and lit a joint, sitting on the windowsill. He could see the big Eiffel Tower sort of thing that had sprung up from Madison Square, first pylon for the dome; and he could even see, past the clutter of skyscrapers downtown, the twin lights of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, where Heidi spent her working days.

Heidi was a port dispatcher. She and the other twenty-five men and women in the control tower had charge of dispatching all of the tugs, barges, cargo vessels, workboats, dredges, pleasure boats, tour boats —everything that floated from the tip of Manhattan on the north to Sandy Beach and the Brooklyn shore on the south. Pleasure boats were the worst. Most of them did not carry radar targets, and so they could be controlled only visually. But if a pleasure boat got into trouble, it was usually agile enough to get itself out of it again, and in any case, the occupants were the only cargo that mattered, and they could almost always be saved in the worst case. The serious part of the work was the big bastards coming up from South America and the Gulf, and the few that came across the Atlantic, and the coasting traffic — and, above all, the barges that brought in fuel and industrial equipment. If you found two of them on a collision course, you couldn't tell them to take evasive action. They couldn't do it. You had to think far ahead with them, point them in the right direction, and sweep everything smaller and more mobile out of their way.

With the garbage strike, her job was easier. The scows weren't being towed out, fourteen or fifteen long strings a day, to the dumping ground two hundred kilometers into the Baltimore Canyon offshore. Day shifts were better than night, too. It was easier to keep visual contact with the little vessels that didn't own transponders or didn't keep them maintained. But wet, windy weather canceled all the advantages out. It reinforced the known fact that the west tower of the Verrazano Bridge was the coldest place in the City of New York. The tower was heated, of course. But when the freezing rain was sleeting in and visibility was patchy, there was no substitute for taking the glasses out on the platform, into the wild, freezing winds; and it was in and out a hundred times a day. So Heidi al-

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ways came home exhausted when the weather was bad. Bratislaw put out forty times as much physical energy as she did; but he needed only a shower and a shave to be ready for anything, until any hour of the night. Heidi was a big woman, but she didn't have her husband's physical strength.

The shower sounds had stopped, and now there was a rattling of medicine chest doors and face-cream jars. Bratislaw stubbed out his joint and reached to turn down the lights.

In the dimness he saw a pulsing green flicker by the door. Hell, he'd forgotten the mail! There wouldn't be anything worth getting except bills, anyway—

But Heidi would notice it, and she would want to see if there was anything from her mother. So Bratislaw walked over to the comm desk and pressed the mail combination. The first three items on the screen were bills, all right — and automatically paid by deductions from their bank account, so they didn't need any attention except to be sorted into the right stores for their tax returns. The fourth—

The fourth began with the heading:

FROM SELECTIVE SERVICE BOARD NO. 143.

"Oh, shit," said Bratislaw.

When Heidi got out of the shower, the lights were full up, Bratislaw was mixing himself another drink, and the text of the letter was still on hold, displayed on the screen:

From the President of the United States, Greeting.

> You have been selected for universal military service and are required to report for your final physical examination on Tuesday, the 3rd of April, to the Armed Forces Induction Center at Number 1 Penn Plaza:...

"Oh, shit," Heidi said, taking the drink Bratislaw held out to her. She was wearing a robe, but he could see that under it she had only a pajama top and a lot of warm, damp, pink skin.

"Of course we knew it was going to come someday," he said.

"But why now, damn it!"

Bratislaw put more ice in his drink and said, "I've been thinking. Of course what I could do is sign up for the City Corps. So I'll be right here for three years, and after basic training, I'd probably only be giving out parking tickets and like that for the first year or so—"

"At nine dollars an hour," Heidi said.

"Well, yeah. Maybe your sister could help me pass the sergeant's examination after the first year."

"Or you could take the eighteen-month field service hitch—"

"And maybe get my ass shot off in Puerto Rico or Miami Beach."

"But at least you'd have it over with. Oh, shit."

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"Or I might fail the physical."

She looked at him, then pulled his robe open and punched him in his hard, flat stomach. "Fail for what? You should've got it over with in college, like me."

"I didn't go to college," he reminded her. "Oh, shit." The evening that had looked so promising was suddenly down the chutes for good; and that was the moment when the doorbell announced Lucy's return for the petition. Realization smote Bratislaw; as he opened the door, he said, under his breath, for about the twentieth time, "Oh, shit."

The sisters were kissing sisters, but while they kissed, Lucy was peering past her sister's ear at Bratislaw. "What is it?" she demanded; then, guessing: "You forgot to tell Heidi about the petition."

Bratislaw was glad for the way out. "Yeah, that's right. I'm really sorry, Loose."

She shook her head. "But there's more to it than that," she went on, looking from him to her sister. "Come on. What?"

So Bratislaw told her about the draft notice, and told his wife about the petition, and by the time they had it all sorted out, he was halfway through the second bottle of wine and it did not, after all, seem like a very good night to start a baby. But Lucy responded with righteousness. She was the do-gooder in the family, the one who had decided to become a police officer in the first place, against all wisdom, and to stay honest in the second — against all custom. "It's a good thing for you, Jeff," she said wisely, "and I'll help you get along, I promise. Now if you two will just sign—"

"Hold it," said her sister. "We can't do that, hon."

"Of course you—"

"No," said Heidi. "we can't, and if you stop to think about it, you'll know it. You don't mind taking your chances; well, that's all right, you're past probation and your job's safe. Pretty safe. But what happens to Jeff if he signs that and then comes on the force? A draftee? With no rank? They'll have his ass, Lucy, and you know it."

Lucy looked at her sister, then at Bratislaw, anger growing in her eyes. "You two! Don't you *care*? Do you want the goddamned mob to *own* the city?"

"It already does, Lucy, and there's nothing we can do about it. And I'm sorry, but that's the way she goes. Good night, Lucy. Come and see us again real soon."

What was wrong was that she was right; Bratislaw knew it; Heidi knew it, even Lucy knew it. Bratislaw wandered over to the window, gazing out at the city, then shrugged, reached for the light remotes, and punched out a five-minute dim-down. The lights began to dwindle toward darkness, and, yawning, he moved toward the bedroom, until his wife's voice

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stopped him. "Jeff, you forgot about the bills."

"What?" He turned, and the console was displaying the bills that had come in in that day's mail. "Oh, God," he groaned, "damn machine's on the blink again. They're all automatic pay, they should have just displayed and gone into memory.... Oh," he said then, staring at the CRT. "Oh, *shit.*"

That was time number twenty-one and the biggest of all, for under the lines of characters that represented the statements from the utilities, the installment purchases, and the insurance company was a glowing red line that said:

BALANCE INADEQUATE

"Damn it! Heidi? Have you been drawing money out of the account without telling me?"

"Of course I haven't, Jeff." But even before the words were out of her mouth, he knew that, for he was punching their banking codes for a statement, and the figures were already appearing for him.

17 MAY 1123 HRS

•• WITHDRAWAL $1710.50 ••

••• BALANCE $8.26 •••

"We've been robbed," he cried. "Somebody broke into our code and cleaned us out! Jesus, this town is really going to the dogs!"

"I've been telling you," said his wife furiously, "we should've invested in a private cipher system."

There were not very many things that Bratislaw really wanted to hear from his wife at that moment. A reminder that she had told him so was about at the bottom of the list. Of course, all the other people they knew had double-locked their telebank systems with private ciphers, but they cost money, you had to remember code words — it was extra trouble. Everybody knew that computer crime was going sky-high in the city — but some everybodies, or at least Jeff Bratislaw, went through life with the confident belief that it would be some other somebody who would be robbed. What an end to a promising day! The draft notice, the disagreement with Lucy, the robbery of the bank account; it was too much. And the dim-down had finished its cycle and he stumbled in darkness toward the bedroom where his wife lay staring at the ceiling.

Unaccountably, she was smiling.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded, a long way from amiable.

She said to the ceiling, "I figured it out. Draft-deferred. Essential industry."

He sat down beside her, puzzled. "What are you talking about, a draft deferment for me? Well, sure, but I'm not in essential industry—"

"You are," crooned his wife happily, "if that bitch you work for says you are. First thing tomorrow, Jeff, you put it to her — I mean," she corrected hastily, "you ask her to work that out for you. Now get in this bed, why don't you?" And actually, as it turned out, it wasn't such a bad night

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for starting a baby, after all.

III

Ella Jennalec met him at the ground-level, and a car was waiting. "You drive," she said, and climbed into the back seat after giving him instructions, and there wasn't much chance to talk until they arrived at the old penitentiary in Bed-Stuy. "You wait," she said, and disappeared up the walk to the entrance. A minute later she came back. "Fucker's in a police lineup," she said disgustedly. "I got to wait till they're through."

Obviously the "fucker" was a prisoner. "Friend of yours, Ella?" Bratislaw asked. She gave him a look.

"Anybody can do me some good is a friend of mine," she said obliquely, and then: "What about you? Can you do me some good?"

"I hope so, Ella." He explained about the draft notice and the fact that he and Heidi really wanted to have a baby. He didn't get a chance to go very far, because she understood what he was asking long before he got to that point.

"Hold it a second, ace," she said, and thought, gazing over the Bed-Stuy City development with its black solar roof panels and its queer spiral windmills. She took her own sweet time, Bratislaw thought. It wasn't as if it were anything hard he was asking for! New York's police, like most city forces, had been federalized long since. When Selective Service got you, it was a choice between three years in the city and taking your eighteen-month draftee jolt with no guarantees about assignment or rank — or even survival, if you got sent to one of the trouble spots. It was really no different from any other job. After basic, you worked only forty hours a week. You started out with parking tickets, graduated to walking a beat with a regular cop — you could even live at home and maybe even moonlight. "Ace," she said seriously, "there's some good deals in the cops, you know. Smart fellow can make a bundle."

"I'd rather work with you, Ella," he said humbly. Not to mention that his wife's sister would crucify him if he turned out to be the kind of cop that made a bundle. She smiled radiantly.

"No big deal, friend," she said cheerfully. "I'll put the word in today."

"What'll I do about the draft notice?"

"Tear it up. Now you just hang in here while I see my friend."

Bratislaw's job was not so much assistant as bodyguard; if he had wondered why Ella Jennalec had picked him, he realized soon enough that his size was at least one of the reasons. Where she went, he went; and she went everywhere. To Brooklyn, where Local 2432 of the Renewable Re-

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source Energy Workers of America was threatening a strike because the dome was going to change the wind patterns in Bedford-Stuyvesant and endanger their jobs. To City Hall, where the Mayor's Commission on City Renewal was meeting. To 125th Street to inspect the northern holddowns; to Jersey City to negotiate with the local across the river; to the top of the World Trade Center; and to the great arch over Central Park, where the dome would reach its greatest height.

Sometimes Ella Jennalec's kid would tag along. It was a surprise to Bratislaw to find out that the union leader had a kid; he had not even known she had a husband, and indeed, if there ever had been one, he did not seem to be on the premises anymore.

After the first day, he formed the habit of picking her up at her apartment. It was a pretty nice apartment. Like every other apartment building in the city, the sidewalk before it was piled shoulder-high with ribbed-paper bags of garbage, waiting for the remote day when someone would come to remove it, and twice Bratislaw saw dirty brown rats scuttle slowly away as he approached. But there was a doorman, and closed-circuit television at every angle, and the first day Bratislaw had to stand around in the lobby for twenty minutes because Jennalec wasn't answering her phone just then.

When at last she was available, she told the doorman to pass him right up. She met him at her door, hair wrapped in one turbaned towel another towel wrapped around her damp body. "Wait in the living room, Jeff. There's coffee if you want it."

The living room was twice the size of Bratislaw's entire apartment. The carpet was wall-to-wall, thick, white. There was a video corner, and surround-sound acoustic cones in the molding overhead. He sat on a couch that was longer than he was tall —big enough to open into a king-sized bed, but, he was willing to bet, not a convertible. Just a couch. He got up again restlessly, peering out the window —the Hudson River was gray between buildings — made himself a cup of coffee from the machine in the kitchen, sat down again. And waited. Bratislaw was not at all sure what he was waiting for, because that flash of golden thigh under the towel as Jennalec turned had started him thinking. But when she came out — fully dressed, jeans, boots, beret to keep her damp hair in place — she was all business. And he was not sure if he was disappointed or not.

When he got home that night and told Heidi about Jennalec's home, she said, "She came out *bare*?

"Ah, no, Heidi. She had a towel around her."

"So did I," she said bitterly, "when you lived across the hall in Stuyvesant Town and I asked you to fix my win-

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dow. But I knew what I was doing, and so does she."

So Jeff Bratislaw's work was to follow Ella Jennalec wherever her work took her, and where her work took her was everywhere the Dome was going to go. That was all of New York — all of the *real* New York, that was to say; namely, Manhattan Island. That was the city that had existed long before the bridge let it swallow Brooklyn and momentum gave it the other boroughs; it was the New York that people from New Jersey and Texas and China meant when they said "New York." Once in a great while, Jennalec went off the island, but there was plenty between the Battery and the Harlem River to keep her busy.

Exactly what she was busy at, though, was harder to understand. Jennalec's position in the union was fogged. "Shop steward" was her title, but steward of which shop? She was as much at home at the Fordham pylon as at the World Trade Center truss. Sometimes she volunteered a reason for one of their errands — a hazard-pay argument near the old U.N. Building, a seniority dispute at the 59th Street Bridge site. When she didn't offer a reason, Jeff sometimes asked. Not after the second day. "Jeffy doll," she said, squirming around in the seat of their car to stare into his eyes, "what you need to know I'll tell you, what I don't tell you is none of your business. O.K.?" "O.K.," said Bratislaw, and remembered it. It stood to reason. Everybody knew that there was a grand jury investigation about to pop, and if any of the mystery rides had anything to do with that, what would be the sense of talking about them? The TV reporters were already leaking stories from the grand jury every night. Let them have their fun; they'd never get anything on Ella Jennalec! Oh, sure, she'd do a favor for a union brother — maybe a favor for a boss now and then. One hand washed the other. How else were you going to get a big job done?

But to prove anything in a put-away-in-jail way — never. The more Bratislaw saw of Ella Jennalec, the more he admired her, and not just because of the way she filled out her jeans. She had guts. She had the kind of courage that obliged him to be brave, too, when she did things like climbing a hundred meters up the catwalk to talk to a rigger — Bratislaw gamely following, clutching the wire rail — or taking the bucket up to the top of the dome pylon itself. Bratislaw came along, but when she was chattering and gesticulating cheerfully with the gang boss, Bratislaw's eyes were fixed firmly on the stately old condos across the river. He didn't look down until they were ten meters from the ground on the return trip. Jennalec nudged him. "I could probably get you on the high demolition now if you still want it," she said, and then grinned. "Just kidding.

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You're doing fine, sweetie. It's always tough the first time — oh, shit, now what's this?"

If Bratislaw had been a little less shaky, he might have reacted faster, might have got between Jennalec and the little man with the blue legal paper. But he wasn't. The little man kept his eye nervously on Bratislaw as he tapped Ella Jennalec with the subpoena, and was watching over his shoulder as he turned and hurried away. Bratislaw opened his mouth to apologize, but Jennalec's grin had already come back. She blew a kiss after the departing process server and handed the paper to Bratislaw. "Drop it off at the lawyer's on the way home," she said, "and don't look so shook-up. What do you think we pay lawyers for?"

Of course the TV had the news, and of course Lucy had it before them. She was waiting at the apartment when Bratislaw got home. It was Heidi's day off. The sisters had been baking something — good smells came from the stove — and more recently they'd been lounging around with a couple of drinks. Lucy was still in uniform, her shoes were off, half the buttons of her blouse open, and her pretty face flushed. "Jeff, dear," she said at once, "you really ought to get away from that witch."

"Ah, Loose, I've had a hard day. Don't make it worse." He gestured to the glasses and ice and watched while she made him a whiskey on the rocks.

"I know what's worrying you," she said, handing it over, "and it's the draft. Right? But honest, it's not that bad. You take city police service and I'll be your rabbi. True, the pay's lousy, but—"

"It's not the pay, Lucy."

"Well, it's sure not the pride in the job! Don't you know what's going to happen to Ella Jennalec? She's got a grand jury indictment for labor racketeering!"

"Frame-up!"

"Jeff, don't be a jerk. They've got the evidence. They've got the witnesses and—" She hestitated, then changed direction. "I know what they've got, and so does she; she's looking at five to fifteen on a felony charge."

He said, "What do you think we pay lawyers for?" He got the words right, but the tone wasn't nearly as smooth.

"Jeff. Listen," said Lucy, spacing her words as to a child. "She's going to go before Justice Horatio Margav." Jeff almost choked on his drink. "That's right! The Hanging Judge of Harlem. She's going to jail, Jeff, and you'd better cut loose from her before you get caught in her mess." Lucy wasn't gloating. She wasn't the kind of person to do that, but Bratislaw's hackles rose.

"Get off my case, Lucy. Ella's doing a great job for the union."

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"The hell she is! She's *scum,* Jeff. They've got — hell, it's in the record, anyway: they've got her on six counts of extortion alone, not to mention two assaults with deadly intent by her old goon, Tiny Martineau. You want to get involved in that? Heidi! Make him listen!"

Heidi shrugged, but her gaze on her husband was steady. He protested, "She doesn't do anything everybody else doesn't do!"

"And that's exactly what's wrong with the city! Too many crooks in positions of trust, and nobody does anything about it. 'Evil,' " Lucy said sententiously, " 'requires no more to triumph than that good men should do nothing.' That's a quotation."

"That's a crock! Ella's got friends with muscle. Do you have any idea how many politicians owe her?"

"They're all going down the tube with her," Lucy predicted. "Horatio Margov will take care of that. Sure, there's plenty that owe her. She can get to the mayor, and the commissioner, and three-quarters of the cops in my precinct. No problem! But it takes only one honest judge and one prosecutor who really wants to make a case, and she's blown away. Jeffy," she said pleadingly, "use your head. The mob's in trouble. They've got nothing going for them in drugs since legalization, there's no prostitution worth bothering with, they can't even steal unless they can crack a computer code, and they're mostly not smart enough for that. So what's the mob got left? Extortion and crooked unions! Once we get them cleaned up, they're out of business! So when we nail your girlfriend, that's the last step—I mean," she finished quickly, glancing at her sister, "'I mean, I didn't mean anything when I called her your girlfriend." But Heidi didn't respond. She just gazed at the wall and her lips were tight.

It wasn't true, anyway. Ella wasn't his girlfriend. True, Bratislaw couldn't help thinking that if a man wanted to make a move, it could easily turn out that way, because Jennalec didn't ever seem to mind appearing before him in her underwear, or slacks without a top, or that towel; and didn't worry so you could notice it if the towel slipped a little. But he didn't make the move, and she didn't seem to give it a thought. She was probably getting plenty, anyway, he thought, just her in that big apartment with her kid, and who knew who came in the door after he left her at night.

Which was, definitely, none of his business. His business was doing what she told him to do. When he tried to tell her what his sister-in-law had said, what she told him to do was forget it. "You like the job? Then just do it. Leave the law part to the lawyers." And he did like the job — not only was it interesting, but the draft deferment had whistled right through as promised, and the pay was a sur-

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prise. *Nice* surprise. Not only was it half again what he'd got on the winch gang, but half of it was in, of all things, cash. Cash! Off the books, and no tax to pay! "Just be careful how you spend it," she instructed. "Clothes, booze, parties — anything like that, fine. Or stick it in a safe-deposit box. But don't go paying off any bank loans, because once you get a transaction into the audit file, they've got you. Now get the car; we're going up to a place in the South Bronx, and you can come in with me. Maybe you'll learn something."

The name of the place was the Bellamy Wind Tunnel Test Facility, and the first and worst thing you noticed about it was the noise. What noise! Roaring like ten jets taking off at once, all of them in your bedroom. Bratislaw hesitated and Jennalec punched his shoulder. "Go," she yelled in his ear, pointing at a woman in a pale green smock, inside a glass cage. "Her. She'll explain it." And Jennalec disappeared into a door marked *Manager — No Admittance.*

Considering that Bratislaw had actually worked on the foundations of the dome, he knew astonishingly little about it. The wind tunnel itself was huge. It had to be, because the model dome inside it was nearly forty feet long. It was rotating slowly and irregularly on a turntable. The tunnel, Bratislaw realized, could not change wind direction, so the test table turned the model. The model didn't show Manhattan itself, only the dome that would cover it. It looked like two scoops of melting vanilla ice cream on an immense banana split — no — it looked like a wax model of a vanilla banana split that had been too long in a store window, with pockmarks and flyspecks all over its surface.

A voice over a PA system called, "Come on in here, why don't you?" and he looked to see the technician waving at him. Gratefully he joined her in the cage. The noise was still loud, but it no longer hurt his ears.

Before the technician was a smaller model of the dome, this one brightly lit in reds and blues that flickered and waxed and waned as he watched. "Hi," said the woman in the green smock. "I'm Marilyn Borg. How do you like it?"

Bratislaw admitted he didn't know enough to have an opinion. The woman smiled. "Ugly thing," she commented. "It would've been nicer to be doming Phoenix or even Los Angeles — so you could have a nice round dome, you know? New York's long and skinny, and it's got all those bridges, and it's got deep water all around it. Bad structurally."

"You mean it won't work?"

"Oh, hell, it'll *work*. But look at the pressure differentials!" The pits on the model outside, she explained, were pressure taps, with transducers that relayed their readings to the

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smaller model in front of her. Negative pressure showed red on the readout model, positive pressure blue; the greater the pressure, the brighter the color. "See here, all this low pressure over the top of the dome? It's like an airplane wing. It wants to take off and fly. Then there's the high pressure where the wind impacts and again where the dome ends — wait a minute." She glanced at a digital clock, then punched in some commands. As the next sequence began, white smoke appeared from each of the acne pits on the dome in the tunnel, streaming across the surface of the dome. She added another set of commands, and the jets became a rainbow of different colors, showing how the smoke currents merged and flowed together. "Look at the old East River bridges! I wouldn't try going for a walk to Brooklyn on a windy day!" And indeed, there was a great deal of turbulence at the base of the model, especially where the bridges came out. "They're going to have to beef up the skirts," Borg predicted gloomily. "Specially the Hudson. The Palisades funnel wind down the river when it's coming the right way, but we can allow for that. Hurricanes," she grinned, "are harder. And so's snow, and rain if it freezes there. You get a quarter of an inch of ice on the dome, that's maybe a hundred thousand tons over the whole surface." She leaned back and regarded Bratislaw. "You're a big one," she commented.

"And you," said Bratislaw gallantly, glancing at the way the smock draped over her breasts, "are a pretty good size yourself."

She tapped the model. "My boyfriend says he doesn't know whether I should study this or wear it."

Well, it never did any harm to jolly the girls along, thought Bratislaw, enjoying himself. Of course nothing would come of it. Well, nothing *had* to come of it, although the more he looked at Marilyn Borg, the more he thought there would be a lot worth looking at under the green smock. It was a painless way to learn about engineering and stress resistance of the dome — the top, he discovered, would go right through the "boundary layer" of the atmosphere, where most of the turbulence was, but the dome shape would minimize the stresses. And about the wind tunnel, powered by three six-bladed propellers, temperature- and humidity-controlled, capable of modeling the stresses of a 150-mile-an-hour hurricane or a two-foot snow load. And about Marilyn Borg herself, until a speaker over his head said, "Come on, stud, time to get out of here." And something about the tone suggested that Jennalec had been listening in.

In the car, Ella surprised Bratislaw by getting in beside him instead of entering the rear seat. "Where to, boss?" he asked, but she didn't answer at first. She was studying him, and for the life of him Bratislaw couldn't tell

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what she was looking for until she asked:

"How's your wife?"

"Oh, fine," he said, and she nodded as though it had been the final answer to a complex problem of diagnosis.

"I've got nothing going for the next couple of hours," she said, "and I think I owe you a home-cooked meal. You interested?"

He swallowed and grinned. "You bet," he said, and turned up the juice.

She didn't slip into anything more comfortable or play mood music for him; she slipped into the kitchen and left him to stare at the antique furnishings. "Five minutes," she called. "No more. I've got most of it made already." To Bratislaw's surprise, the "home-cooked" meal was hardly cooked at all. It was salad and a tureen of soup; and the soup, he could tell by the smell, was fish broth. "It'll taste better than it smells," she promised. "I should've warned you, I don't eat meat."

He sampled it and it was true; it was a very thin soup, almost Japanese, but it made its appeal, and the salad was crisp and crunchy, with nuts and bits of what he guessed to be crisped potato-like nuggets. "How come?" he asked.

"You mean about the meat? Oh, I used to. Back in Bed-Stuy, I ate it all the time — you know how kids are. But the first job I got was on the feedlots in Flushing Meadows. You know the place? Processing water hyacinth. They mow it on the lakes, and dry it in the exhaust from the city heat pumps, and chop it up, and give it to the cows. The cows love it. Makes great steaks, too."

"Well, then why?"

She looked disgusted. "I found out what else they gave them! Sterilized sewage sludge. SCP — that's single-cell protein; they grow it on the sludge from the sewers, and it's supposed to come out clean and pure. But I know where it comes from! And that's not all. Rock dust — would you believe it? Paper-mill trimmings! Their own shit! You eat a hamburger, and what you're really mostly eating is a cowflop brick mixed with confetti and weeds — no, thanks!"

"It was the same in Wisconsin," Bratislaw offered, "except they had all this whey left over from cheese making. You don't know stink till you smell that stuff."

"And you still put it in your mouth?" She finished the last of her salad and sat back, lighting a joint and looking at him speculatively. "What all kind of stuff *do* you put in your mouth, Brat?" she inquired.

The best thing to do, Bratislaw thought, was to take it as a joke. So he laughed, around a forkful of carrot slices and raw cauliflower, and changed the subject. "Where's your boy?" he asked.

Ella nodded, as though it weren't

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a change of subject at all. "He's in school. Won't be home for three hours. Take a hit," she added, passing the joint over to Bratislaw and sitting up in her chair. "Help me put the dishes in the machine, and then I've got something for you to do. See, Brat, Tiny had some special duties besides driving me around. I haven't needed them much lately — but a couple of friends aren't friends anymore. So, the thing is," she finished, getting up and taking his hand, "I think it's about time you found out what the special duties are."

If Heidi suspected that the nature of the relationship had changed, she didn't show it. There was a tug captain's strike, and so her job was harder and longer than ever. When she got home at night, she was tired. If Jeff Bratislaw wasn't home by the time she was ready to go to bed, she went to bed anyway. It was just as well. Bratislaw was a reasonably horny man, but Ella Jennalec used him up pretty well — no long, stretched-out orgies, but now it was first thing in the morning before they set out for the day, and usually again at night before he went home, and now and then an occasional joust somewhere during the day. Apart from that, their relationship stayed about the same; she kept all the same engagements, did all the same work, spent all the same hours on the car phone between stops. But she talked to him more. About herself. About him. About the world. She even talked about her upcoming trial before Judge Margov, and the kind of courage she showed on the high steel was still there when she talked about the proceedings. "You're some woman," said Bratislaw, and the admiration in his voice wasn't feigned.

She was in the seat beside him, riding uptown. "Yeah," she said thoughtfully, looking at him. When she left him at the curb in front of a sleazy-looking loft building, she was still thoughtful, and when, half an hour later, she came back out, she was grinning. He started to engage the electric motor, but she stopped him. "Wait a second," she said, her hand on his; and he paused, perplexed.... And then he saw what she was waiting for. Out of the same doorway came a tall, white-haired figure, looking cautiously around before ducking into a subway station. It was Horatio Margov, the Hanging Judge of Harlem himself. He turned, startled, to Ella, whose grin was triumphant. "Just keep your mouth shut," she advised. "And the next time listen to me when I tell you not to worry."

But he worried all the same, worried mostly about whether he would have the willpower not to tell his wife, and whether she would then be able to keep from telling her crusading sister ... it was not a worry he needed to have. When he got home

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that night, Heidi wasn't asleep. She wasn't even there. All the lights were on, and there was a flashing red message on the CRT: "Jeff, Lucy's been hurt. Meet me at Bellevue."

It took him twenty minutes to get to the hospital and half an hour to find his wife, up in a sixth-floor waiting room that smelled of disinfectant and unwashed clothing. "Her head's crushed in," she sobbed. "Somebody mugged her. She's in intensive care, and they don't know if she's going to live."

"Oh, honey," he said, his arms around her.

"They let me see her," Heidi sobbed. "You couldn't even see her face, Jeff! What kind of animal would do something like that? The decentest, best human being I ever knew...." She pushed herself a few inches away from him and looked up into his face. "And one other thing," she added. "I went to the doctor today myself, and I'm pregnant."

IV

The police report was stark and skimpy. Police Officer Lucille R. Sempler had been on regular patrol duty on South Water Street, checked in by radio at 1730, was overdue for her 1800 report. In that interim she had made no calls, nor were any transmitted to her. On failure to report, a search was instituted, and Police Officers William Gutmacher and Alicia Mack found her suffering blunt-instrument wounds to the head and several lacerations, apparently the result of a struggle, in an entryway. No witnesses. No known motive. Police lab was investigating physical evidence. The investigation would continue.

The police themselves were not much more informative, not out of policy but because they knew nothing. "Lucy was always looking for something wrong," said her precinct captain. "Probably it was somebody she busted. We're checking everything —and she was one hell of a fine lady," he added.

Bratislaw, too, thought Lucy was a fine lady. He knew that his wife felt more strongly than that; but he was not prepared for just how much Heidi cared.

Bratislaw knew about pregnant women; he had a sister sixteen years younger than himself, and he remembered the months before she had been born. Morning sickness he was ready for, and it came. A failing interest in making love he suspected, and that came too. But his mother had not had a dear sister nearly murdered in her first month, and so there was nothing to prepare him for Heidi's unending, dry-eyed sorrow. She had given up gaiety. When he came home late at night, she was almost always already in bed — and almost never asleep, though she pretended to be. He tested her to be sure. After a week of it, he rolled over in bed, changed

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position a time or two, and then let his breathing become slow and nasal. Sure enough. A few minutes later, Heidi slipped out of bed and retreated silently to the living room, where he found her sitting unmoving and unoccupied by the window. When he spoke, she didn't answer.

Every day Heidi hurried from her work to the hospital to spend an hour at Lucy's bedside. She didn't ask Bratislaw to go with her, but worry made him volunteer. It was astonishing. In her sister's presence, Heidi was Heidi again, sparkles and smiles and gossip and plans for what they would all do when Lucy "got better." And, of course, Lucy's mummy-wrapped head did not respond. Could not respond. Could only gurgle past the tubes in her mouth, or twitch the restless fingers on the sheet. When they were outside, Bratislaw said, "Honey? It's not much good making plans for when she gets better. She isn't going to get better. She doesn't even really hear you."

Heidi did not either flare up or cry. The mask was on her face again. "They're going to send her to a skinner," she observed detachedly.

"That's good," said Bratislaw, meaning, *That's the same as being dead, anyway, isn't it?* A lot could be done with the veggies by means of behavior modification, but what could not be done was to turn them into responsive, active, companionable human beings again. Heidi understood his meaning. She said:

"I'm tired, Jeff, and I don't want to talk. Let's go home."

The other thing Heidi did with her free time was nag the police. There were no arrests in the case, and, Bratislaw believed, there was no real expectation that there ever would be. The average New Yorker's chance of suffering some sort of violent crime in any given year was one in sixty, and when it was a witnessless mugging, like Lucy's, the crime was rarely solved. Heidi didn't share his opinion, and so, once a day, she was on the phone with Lieutenant Finder at the precinct, demanding action. After three weeks of it, Bratislaw tried firmness. "Heidi, honey," he began, "why don't you get off the lieutenant's back? He's doing the best he can."

She picked at the dinner before her and didn't answer. He tried a different tack. "They're going to send her to the skinner at Peekskill pretty soon, aren't they? I mean, there's no sense keeping her in the hospital anymore."

"She said my name the other day," Heidi observed.

"Well, fine, but I talked to the doctors, too, and that's as far as she's likely to go. Honey? Shouldn't we be thinking about alternatives?"

She looked at him. "You mean cryonic suspension."

"Maybe. It's not such a bad idea.

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There's some hope that someday they could fix her up, you know, and then—"

"And then I'd be dead, Jeff, and so would you, and I'd never see my sister anymore."

Bratislaw sighed and began to gather up the dishes, while Heidi retreated to the bathroom. An hour later, getting into the bed next to the motionless form with the covers over its head, Bratislaw said, "I know you don't want to talk about it, but you're never gong to be able to bring her back."

Heidi didn't move or respond. Then, as he sighed and rolled over, she said without moving, "You're right." As he fell asleep, he wondered why her answer had not been satisfying.

Surprisingly, Ella Jennalec was a strong support to Bratislaw in his troubles, though not sexually. She never said their sexual relationship was over, or at least suspended pending the resolution of his family troubles, but it was. She simply did not invite him to her bedroom anymore. There was intimacy, yes, but a different kind. When she invited him to stay for coffee, her housekeeper was there, a waddling old woman from Kenya who admired Bratislaw's brawn and fed him up accordingly when she could. Or there was Jennalec's son, Michael, ten years old, bright-eyed, and endlessly inventive. He had never seen a farm, and so plagued Bratislaw for stories about Wisconsin. They were more family for him than Heidi and (certainly) than Lucy was. And there was that other intimacy, the political one, the one that was the core of Jennalec's existence and became pretty much Bratislaw's. As she let him closer and closer into the councils of power, Bratislaw began to understand the significance of those strange errands to places outside her jurisdiction, involving trades and skills not under her reign. There was something brewing, and it was *big*. Intimacy did not extend to particulars, but there were a dozen unions involved, there was a timetable, there was going to be a decisive act — and the time was not far away.

For a solid week, Jennalec's program took her to visit bridges — the George Washington, the Triborough, the East River spans first, and that was not surprising. All of them required special modification so that they could enter the vast dome when it was completed without destroying its geodesic integrity or producing the devastating turbulence he had seen in the wind-tunnel model. But what did the Verrazano-Narrows crossing have to do with it? Bratislaw didn't know. Jennalec didn't say. She left him at the base of one of the pylons while she went off on an errand to the working levels at the top. Heidi worked there — was there now, doing her job as a port controller; for

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a moment Bratislaw thought of dropping in on her unannounced. At one time it would have been a good idea. Now it didn't seem that way. So he stood in the lee of the pylon, shivering in the wet, hard wind in spite of the fact that it was full summer, and waited for Jennalec to come down.

She was scowling. "Your wife's a pain in the ass, do you know that?" she announced.

"Did you see her?"

"Didn't talk to her, if that's what you mean — but she's got the others scared. A regular whistle-blower, your wife! A big fan of UTMs."

Bratislaw was puzzled; Heidi was almost as much a do-gooder as her late sister — but she had never mentioned any big feeling one way or the other about the Universal Town Meetings. "I don't get you," he said.

"None of your business," said Jennalec sharply, pulling her sweater tighter around her. "Let's get the hell out of this wind — damn! Who needs it *now*?"

What she meant by that was none of his business, too, he found. But the things that she was willing to allow him in on were interesting enough, though scary. He had not realized how the kickbacks and payoffs mounted up, or what a network of union and public officials were involved in them, until he began adding up the lists of people Jennalec had surreptitiously visited. He was almost glad that Heidi wasn't much interested in talking to him these days. He would have found it hard to keep her from doing the same sort of calculation as himself, and who knew what conclusions she might have come to?

In other ways, the estrangement was nothing to be glad about at all. J. F. K. Bratislaw was a healthy male in the prime of his life who didn't like masturbating. When both his wife and his employer canceled sex, he missed it badly — within a couple of weeks, desperately. He wondered what the technician at the wind tunnel was doing, thought of calling her up, wondered if Ella Jennalec would mind — did nothing.

The first upturn in his amative fortunes came when he came home almost on time one night and found the apartment full of cooking smells. Heidi was in good spirits. She made them both drinks while the microwave finished their baked bluefish. Responding to the look on his face, she laughed. "You haven't noticed anything special about this week?" she asked.

He pursed his lips while he ran through his mental card file. Not Christmas and not Valentine's Day. Not their anniversary—

"Your birthday!" he exclaimed. "But that's not until Sunday."

She grinned and shook her head. "That's not what I mean, although there's something I'd like from you. You really haven't noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

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"I haven't thrown up for a week!" And, indeed, she had never looked better. Or, it seemed, felt better. All through dinner she talked, just like old times, long, complicated stories about the string of LNG barges that had been misidentified at first as garbage scows, and what might have happened if they'd been allowed to try to make the passage under the bridge in the thirty-knot wind, about her co-workers, about how well Lucy was doing at the skinner, about when she could feel the baby kick. She not only talked. She listened. She let Bratislaw talk about the job, and the trouble with the hold-downs on Morningside Heights, and the twelve kilometers of cable that had failed the stress tests and been rejected, and Ella Jennalec's loathing for the Universal Town Meeting.... "Well, sure she hates it," Heidi commented. "It's what keeps her from running the whole city."

"Aw, hell, Heidi! She's got it made now; why would she want more?"

"Everybody *always* wants more, Jeff; that's what governments are all about. That's what the UTM's about, it's what keeps the power brokers and the bribers from taking over. Not just unions. Contractors. Builders. Everybody who can make an extra buck by breaking the law, or forcing the government to let them do something they're not supposed to. Lucy said—" She paused, then shook her head, smiling. "But let's not argue tonight, honey. Come on, help me get the dishes in the machine."

As soon as they had the dishes in the washer and the garbage sorted and stowed, they went to bed, without discussion or delay. Heidi's belly was beginning to plump out. At first Bratislaw found it disconcerting — but not incapacitating. Not even the first time. Much less the second and third. When at last they both had had enough, they lay spoon-fashion, Bratislaw holding his wife in his arms, for a long time. Bratislaw was beginning to think Heidi had drifted off to sleep when she stirred and, without turning, said, "Honey? About Sunday...."

Half-asleep, Bratislaw was not to be caught out. He remembered what Sunday was. "You mean on your birthday. What would you like?"

"Well, one thing, actually. Would you come up to see Lucy with me?"

"I would love it," said Bratislaw, and meant it at the time.

On Sunday, though, he wasn't so sure. The trip up the Hudson was fine enough because it was on an excursion boat all the way to Peekskill, up past the Palisades along the beautiful Hudson shore. The boat left from Battery Park, and for the first few miles, Bratislaw was able to explain to his wife just where the dome was going, looking like two humps on a camel: the tall igloo one down around Lower Manhattan, the lower connecting

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bridge from Canal Street to the twenties, the big elongated one covering Midtown and Central Park. It was only the middle passage that had been mostly covered with its hexagons of plastic so far. North and south was still only steelwork, with some of the tensed cables strung so that it looked like lacy spiderwebbing as they sailed past. The boat was full of families on excursion, aiming for Bear Mountain or Indian Point. Cheerful, a lot of kids, and quite a few very small ones that Bratislaw noticed his wife observing with tenderness. It wasn't easy to fight their way into the boat's dining room for lunch, but the hostess noticed Heidi's thickening belly and eased them in early. The food wasn't all that bad, and Heidi even allowed herself a bottle of beer with the cheese omelet. When they were up to the coffee, she said, "I've got a present for you."

After four years, Bratislaw knew his wife's habits, but he protested, "It isn't *my* birthday."

"If I can't give you a present when I want to on my birthday, when can I? Hold still." And she pulled a tinsel-wrapped package out of her bag, opened it, and displayed a carved wooden amulet on a golden chain. "It's the lover's knot," she said. "It keeps people who love each other together."

"I'll never take it off," said Bratislaw, touched. His wife nodded solemnly.

"Except maybe in the shower," she advised. "Jeff? It's mostly to thank you for coming here with me. I do appreciate it."

"I'm glad to do it," he said proudly. But half an hour later, he wasn't so sure. He had never been at the New York Peekskill Facility before — what they called "the uptown skinner." As the taxi drove up the entrance road, it was all green trees and flower beds, and if you noticed that the flowers were in ragged patterns and some of the borders were bare, well, that almost added to its rural charm. The buildings were pretty enough. Most of them were low framed two-story garden apartments, with a pretty brick central building and people moving around the paths. It was only when you got close to the people that they became strange. On a wall by the entrance gate, a skinny twenty-year-old man was snapping back and forth as though in an invisible rocking chair, thunk-thunk, like a metronome. A young man in a tank top and open fly approached them, smiling wordlessly to show no teeth at all. A terribly obese young girl, maybe fourteen years old, was lying on her belly in the middle of the path, unmoving; Bratislaw had to step over her to get by, and from her blubbery body in the warm sun, even in the open air of the Hudson River country, there arose a terribly unwashed stench. Heidi, who had been to the skinner before, watched her husband with concern. "Hon-

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ey? There's a coffee shop over there. Why don't you go get a cup, and I'll find Lucy and bring her there."

"Sure," said Bratislaw gratefully, and accepted directions and an order to get for Lucy and Heidi. But the canteen was no better. He had had some sort of idea that it was off limits to residents, except maybe Lucy, but the place was full of inmates. The boy with the open fly followed him in as he took his place in line, just behind a fifty-year-old woman with the unlined face of a teenager, who turned around to study him.

"What's your name?" she demanded; and when he told her: "What do you do? Who do you work for? What's she like?" It was not at all clear to Bratislaw that she listened to the answers. It was as though she were a parrot, socialized into the questions of social conversation but without any particular interest in the other person's part. He secured coffee for himself, iced tea and a Coke for Heidi and her sister, and, as ordered, two large bags of corn chips. It was his fear that some of the inmates would sit down with him, and so he hurriedly propped the other chairs at the corner table he found. They didn't, but the boy with the open fly sat at the next table, licking up a sundae as though it were an ice-cream cone, still grinning toothlessly and without speaking at Bratislaw.

He wished desperately for his wife and sister-in-law to arrive, but when they did, it was almost worse. He had not been prepared for seeing his sister-in-law in a football helmet with her name printed in large letters across the front, and painted again on the back of her police academy T-shirt. Pretty Lucy! Her face was as pretty as ever, and if anything, her eyes were merrier and her expression more vivacious. The dedicated do-gooder look was gone from her face, and she didn't explain to Bratislaw the ways in which he should be working his ass off to improve society. She hardly spoke at all. She listened as Heidi chattered on about the baby clothes she was buying for the baby, and how nice it was to have some breeze after all the terrible heat, and had the thunderstorms been as bad here as they had been in the city?

When Lucy answered, it was almost always either "yes" or "no," like a binary bit in a solid-state computer. When she spoke, it was only a word or two. "Friend," she said, reaching out to touch the arm of the huge black girl, six-foot-three at least, who came around to clear off their table. "Molly," Lucy announced, smiling prettily, although the girl did not interrupt slamming cardboard plates into her trash bag to answer.

Heidi rescued her iced tea just in time. "Molly is going to graduate soon," she told Bratislaw. "Isn't that true, Molly?" But the girl didn't answer until she had finished mopping

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the table and was moving to the next, when she said over her shoulder, quite clearly and politely:

"That's true, Mrs. Bratislaw, and I'm really looking forward to it."

But Lucy was no longer listening. She had caught sight of the teenager with the open fly, now standing before them. He was exhibiting himself to the women, smiling proudly. Lucy jumped up. "Dan!" she cried furiously. "Teeth!" The boy's smile faded. He put his penis back inside his shorts, pulled a set of artificial dentures out of his pocket, stuffed them into his mouth, and morosely walked away.

"Dan just hates to wear his teeth," Heidi told Bratislaw conversationally, but he could hear the strain in her voice. The place was telling on her, too — and she had been coming up here three times a week for nearly two months.

There was a boat back every hour, and the return tickets in Bratislaw's pocket felt more and more precious; but he could not make himself take Heidi away. His mind was made up to pretend to be enjoying the visit — or at least to be generous and loving enough to want to prolong it. He was a victim of his own dissembling skill; twice Heidi asked him if he wanted to go, and twice he lied. When Lucy suddenly stood up and said, "Work time," he was all ready to smile and make his farewells, but Heidi said hesitantly:

"Honey? If you really don't mind staying awhile, I'd kind of like to see what Lucy's doing. You know, she's been promoted. She's really coming along very well." And how could he say no to that? It did not relieve his depression that the job Lucy had been promoted to turned out to be feeding and caring for the bedridden inmates, but he was surprised to find that Lucy took the lead as they left the canteen. Out the door, down a golden walk, she turned right at a walk whose concrete was striped black and white; it was only when she came to the next intersection that she had to stop and think. She shrugged almost as she always had, smiled at her brother-in-law, and said clearly, "Where's the bedridden ward?" She had a sort of wristwatch thing on, larger than looked sensible; from it a sweet, tiny voice whispered, "What color is the path, Lucy?"

"Came off black and white. Got red, got yellow with kind of wavy lines, got green with white dots."

"Take the green with white dots, Lucy. Turn left at the mess hall." And she was off again, her sister following, smiling gamely, her brother-in-law following and, last in line with no one to see his face, his expression sour. The bedridden wards! But there was a last-minute reprieve, because at the door of the low, cool building with its ominous smells coming from inside, Lucy paused and shook her head.

Heidi translated, "This is kind of

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women's stuff, honey. Would you mind if you didn't come in?"

He was glad to accept the offer, and Lucy said happily, "Tour tape." That turned out to mean that if he chose to go the Administration Building, they would be glad to lend him a walking-tour tape machine for visitors, which would explain everything he wanted to know about the Peekskill Facility.

Actually, it explained far more. Bratislaw got the cassette, all right, but then he braved the canteen long enough to get a container of coffee — there wasn't anything stronger — and found a deserted section of the grounds to drink it in. It didn't stay deserted long. The youth with the open fly passed by several times, waving happily each time; his teeth were out again, Bratislaw noted. The woman with the white hair and smooth, untroubled face came to stare at him for twenty minutes straight, and she had brought a friend along, an ancient black man in a wheelchair, who muttered unceasingly to the woman in a thick, gravelly voice. But they didn't speak to Bratislaw, and he avoided eye contact, and eventually they went away.

To be replaced by other members of this parade of freaks, of course. He was glad at last to put the plug in his ear, close his eyes, and listen to the cordial voice of the recorded tour guide, telling him in what ways the Peekskill Facility served its residents.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Bratislaw III was a humane man almost always, and a generous one by instinct, and certainly he was thoughtful toward his family when he remembered to be. He had loveable traits. Heidi loved him enough to want to have his child, and Heidi was an intelligent and perceptive woman. When he listened to the ways in which the Peekskill facility practiced behavior modification and social facilitation, and the enumeration of the skills taught and the number of employed graduates, he found it profoundly satisfying. How wonderful that handicapped people could be so helped!

That worrisome smell from the far edge of the grounds, he was pleased to discover, was nothing more sinister than a henhouse where batteries of poultry were raised for eggs and slaughter. The bright things that looked like cocktail toothpicks in the farm plots were markers for the people who weeded and picked: bright plastic cucumbers and tomatoes and avocados showed which plants to spare and when they were ready to pick. There were off-reservation work parties that served the communities of Newburgh and Poughkeepsie, picking up and sorting trash and reclaiming the valuable glass and metals and organics.

The skinner did not, of course, come anywhere near paying for itself, but it provided the inmates with one-quarter of their food and 20 percent

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of their own supervision — with one person in each group of fifty detailed to such tasks as inspecting the others for haircuts, for bathroom habits, for birth control. There were special competitions — spelling bees for the under-90 IQs, board games for the under-70s. The residents with salvageable coordination were taught to crochet lace or string bead necklaces; the clumsier, but educable ones worked on the farm plots or in the recycling rooms, and the money they earned helped keep the "tuition" down. Even the terminally senile and the dying were aided in large part by other residents, specially trained — and that was where Bratislaw's thoughts left the objective merits of the skinner and turned to what was left of his pretty, devoted, lively sister-in-law. Also his strong sister-in-law, strong in principle and, you had to say, physically strong, because not everybody would have survived so brutal and bonecrushing a beating, or should—

Or should?

Bratislaw clicked off the machine, now beginning its third repetition, and started for the infirmary, because he hadn't liked the thoughts that had crossed his mind. He was early, and he didn't expect he would be let in, but evidently all the bedpan cleaning and diaper changing was over. Lucy was patiently feeding the last of her charges some gummy, gruelly porridge that looked like strained baby food. Probably was; and the old woman was dribbling and drooling it as thoroughly as any three-month-old. Heidi was sitting beside the bed, looking frayed, and Bratislaw thought indignantly that this couldn't be good for her, in her condition!

"Good," said Lucy approvingly, and mopped off the old woman's bristly chin. "What dessert?" The old woman glared, so Lucy tried the menu: "Choc'at puddin'? Ban'a yogurt?" At the second suggestion, the old lady glared, puffed, turned purple, and managed an "Ess!" The banana yogurt seemed to take forever, but at last it was over, and Lucy was through with her chores for the day — and it was time, ah, blessed time! — for the walk to the taxi to the last boat of the day.

At the gate, Lucy suddenly turned on the other residents who had been following at a distance: the black man in the wheelchair, his white-haired woman companion, and Lucy's friend and roommate. She shooed them like poultry. "Go away, Molly, Dandy, Elise. Go away."

It was the longest speech Bratislaw had heard from her that day. Lucy's face was screwed up in concentration as she turned to her sister: "Baby all right?" she asked, as though Heidi hadn't been telling her all about the baby all day.

Heidi nodded. "Oh, yes, honey, it's coming along fine."

Lucy nodded. "Box?" she demanded, eyes squinting with the effort.

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"Yes," said Heidi, as though she understood, "it's all taken care of."

"Come back?"

And that was when Lucy seemed near to weeping. "You bet we'll be back," she promised. "As soon as we can — but here's the taxi, and it's getting ready to rain!" A couple of farewell kisses — surprisingly warm and pleasant, if you didn't look at the football helmet or think about what Lucy had once been—

And at last they were free.

It did rain. It came down like the cloudbursts of the tropics, with thunder and lightning and gusty winds that made the old excursion steamer shudder. The decks were bare, all the holiday-makers crammed inside; there was no place to sit. The best Bratislaw could find was a corner by a window, where Heidi could at least perch on the sill and not much of the rain came through. He had things on his mind. "Honey," he began, "it must cost a bundle to keep somebody in that place."

The strain lines were deep on Heidi's face. "We don't pay it, Jeff. It all comes from the police disability fund."

"Well, sure, but there's a question of social responsibility here, isn't there? Especially since it's Lucy. Especially since she's so strong for good citizenship and all."

His wife said steadily, "Jeff, I know what you're getting at. You want me to take Loose out of the skinner. You want me to get her frozen like some boat person."

"For her own *good,* honey!"

"Oh, Jeff." She turned to gaze out the window. The rain began to beat in on her, but she paid it no attention. "Let me explain to you, will you? Freezing's not so bad for the boat people — they don't want to go back, they can't stay, and anyway, at least they freeze whole families together. And if you're in desperate pain, sure, get frozen. But there's a risk ... and even if it works, even if a hundred years from now they figure out how to fix up her head. and bring her back, and she's as good as new — where will I be, Jeff? And she's my sister."

It was a rotten end to an already crummy day.

But there was still more to come. By the time they got to the Battery, the storm was over. The streets were sloshy-clean, and there was a fresh, cool breeze. As they looked for a cab, Bratislaw said, "I guess we'll do what you want about Lucy, honey."

She nodded, and then managed a smile. "We just won't talk about that anymore," she agreed. "We've got plenty of better things to think about. Like us," she and put up her face to be kissed.

V

The summer wore on, stagnant when it wasn't stormy. For Jeff Bratis-

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law, though, it wasn't bad at all. Heidi did not stop her pilgrimages to the Peekskill Facility, but she didn't stop the kisses, either. If Ella Jennalec was sometimes tense and abstracted, she was also convincingly annoyed when he asked questions. "You worry too much," she said. "I told you, we've got this indictment thing licked."

"Sure, Ella," he said obligingly. Since everyone was telling him not to worry, he didn't worry. Not even about the weather. The storminess kept coming. There were hurricanes boiling up out of the South Atlantic every four or five days. None of them hit the track that would take it up the Eastern seaboard, but Bratislaw couldn't help wondering what would happen if one did. So he asked Ella.

"You mean after the dome's finished? Nothing. They claim it's safe for up to two hundred miles an hour. Right now, though, — Jesus!" She was grinning with pleasure. "There'd be plastic falling in Portugal. That's why we're gonna win out, Jeffer. I'm getting ready for a strike if they don't give us hazard pay — with escalations — anytime the wind's over what they call Force Three. Oh, and listen. Tomorrow I'm going to take my kid along with us, if you don't mind. He'll be home from camp tonight."

"Why should I mind?"

She nodded, acknowledging the justice of the question, then changed the subject. "I hear you were up to the skinner in Peekskill."

That was disconcerting. Bratislaw didn't want to ask her how she knew, but his expression asked it for him. She grinned. "I got a father up there," she said, "so I keep in touch. He's a mean old goat, but I kept him around as long as I could. Now it's senile aphasia. He forgets things, like his name — he never did know mine real well," she finished bitterly. "Still, he's my dad, and I would've kept him longer if he hadn't started peeing the bed. They didn't skin him worth shit, though. I took him out for a weekend, and he wet the bed worse than ever." She looked at her watch, then ordered, "So go home to the pregnant wife, boy. I got company coming."

Company: Another lover? That would explain why she had cut him off — not that he minded, because the way things were with Heidi these days, who needed Ella Jennalec? But he was wrong about that, he realized as he finished parking her car. He saw a taxi coming in and it contained Ella's kid, a mountain of luggage, and an escort.

The escort was wearing a cast and carrying a cane, but Bratislaw recognized him. It was Tiny Martineau.

Ella Jennalec didn't mention Tiny to Bratislaw, and Bratislaw said nothing to his boss. It wasn't a good idea to bother Ella these days, as the summer went through the hottest spells the city had seen for a decade or

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more. She was edgy, irritable — just plain mean sometimes. Bratislaw began to wonder if being drafted into the City Patrol Corps would, after all, be so much worse. There were more and more meetings to go to, and neither Bratislaw nor any of the other bodyguards/thugs/administrative assistants were allowed inside. Even the union officials had to pass through metal detectors. They were searched and their briefcases were fluoroscoped while the musclemen lounged around in hallways and anterooms, sizing each other up speculatively.

There was a new organization being born, a Metropolitan Trades Action Council, and its birth pangs were private. That all sounded reasonable enough. Doming the city made big problems for the unions, because it involved great physical changes in the way the city worked. Once the dome was up, sanitation men wouldn't use trucks anymore: there went one job classification. They would get more deeply involved in recycling on-site, maybe — unless that was turned over to private-sector operations — unless the unions were able to forestall that before it got off the ground, or anyway, get a piece of the action if it went private. Organic waste would now go into sewage, and there were big possibilities in the sludge-handling trades, but what about the men who had run the barges? Industrial wastes would be stockpiled and maybe mined, perhaps with bioconcentration via algae, etc. —the technology was complicated, and Bratislaw wasn't sure he understood it. But neither did the union leaders, and they needed to know about it so they could mark off their spheres of influence.

All that made sense, but in the chatter with the other muscles, Bratislaw confirmed his opinion that the primary topic in the secret meetings had little to do with any of the above. The big concern was the grand jury. Ella wasn't the only one who had been subpoenaed. Their lawyers were manufacturing delays and postponements with great skill. But that couldn't last forever. The news broadcasts said so. The trouble with that was that the newscasters gloated over the Hanging Judge of Harlem's white-hot crusading determination to wipe out organized crime in the unions of the city, and Bratislaw had not forgotten whom he had seen coming out of the secret meeting.

More than anything else, he wished he still had Lucy to serve as his social data bank, and maybe a little bit even his conscience. Lucy was the one who had explained to him that with most of the drug laws — and all the prostitution statutes — repealed, so that cocaine was sniffed even at the mayor's fund raisers, and the Yellow Pages had a fifteen-page listing under "Sexual Services," more than half the revenues of organized crime had gone down the toilet. The unions were about all they had left. There

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were still a couple of unions in the city that had not become gangster-run, but, off-hand, Bratislaw couldn't think of which they were.

Ella's kid came back from his camp in the Rockaways tanned and heavier than when he left, and Bratislaw found baby-sitting added to his duties. Not often. Just when Ella Jennalec was going to be tied up all day in one place, whereupon the union car and the union driver, namely Bratislaw, might as well be doing something more useful than just sitting around outside the hall. So Bratislaw got to climb the Statue of Liberty, and point out to Michael the bridge where his wife worked, and the hold-downs in the harbor where he himself had once toiled. He went to the Bronx Zoo and the American Museum of Natural History and the Planetarium. They even went to prison together, or at least to visit the great Nathanael Greene Institute for Men; and the days wore on toward the end of summer. The boy was a bright spot in Bratislaw's life. His wife Heidi was another. "I think I'm going to take an early maternity leave," she told him one night as she was just out of the shower and he just about to go in.

He patted her belly, rounding up nicely now and still dewy from the bath. "Aren't you rushing the gun?"

"There's so much to do," she apologized; and, indeed, she was looking gaunt in the face, though nowhere else. She was worrying too much about her sister, Bratislaw reflected as he sudsed and rinsed, and he got out of the shower to tell her so, still toweling and dripping water on the rug.

Heidi was in the bedroom but not in bed. She was bent over something, and when he came in, she jumped up, startled. She had his amulet in her hands. "You *scared* me," she cried. And when his look told her he had a question, she added, "I was just polishing it up. You sweat so, Jeff."

He was touched: she was keeping their love bright. And so, he vowed, would he; and for some time after that, he worked at it, and she fully cooperated.

The hurricanes had started in June. Alfred pooped out on the way to Bermuda; Betsey wandered into the Gulf of Mexico; Curtis creamed Cuba and threatened all of Florida, then madly backtracked and lost itself in the mid-Atlantic. By Labor Day, they were up to Michael, tracking stolidly up the coast but more than two hundred miles offshore, and Ella decided it was time to give her son the promised treat. Not the big dome. Not even the little tube-shaped dome that connected the two big ones. But there was Aqueduct Race Track with a dome of its own, and Ella claimed herself entitled to a day off. Michael wasn't interested in betting, but he was thrilled by the horses themselves, and by the power of his mighty mother, demonstrated in her obtaining for

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him a pass and a guide that let them go into the stables and the owners' enclosure at the paddock. Ella Jennalec stayed with them a while, but her love of the breed stopped at picking winners. Long before the first race, she was up in her box, studying the forms and placing her bets on the daily double.

Bratislaw and the boy watched the grooms bringing back the horses from the first race. The winner was a roan gelding, three years old. While all the other horses padded quietly enough to their stalls, the gelding was conducted to a shed where a man in a white coat pulled back its lip and dabbed at its teeth with a white pad.

"What's that all about?" the boy asked, and their guide, a twenty-year-old groom whose horse had been scratched, explained:

"That's the spitbox, where they take the winners to get a saliva test."

"You mean they might be doped?" the boy demanded, thrilled.

"Who knows? Anyway, it's the law. That's a pretty horse," she added enviously; and as the boy moved closer, warned, "Don't touch him now, though."

"Why not?"

"Because he's not through with his tests, that's why." And as the boy followed the handsome, sweat-darkened horse, she lagged behind and whispered to Bratislaw: "You sure you want the kid to see this?"

"See what?" But she didn't have to answer, because the horse was in its stall, and a man with a shiny metal can on the end of a long pole was chirruping and shuffling his feet through the straw. The boy stared in delight as the horse's immense sexual organ extended itself. The man quickly slipped the can under the horse's penis and caught some of the splash of urine.

"Jesus," said the boy. "Wonder what Ma would say to *that*?"

"I think we ought to get back to the clubhouse," said Bratislaw.

The boy grinned. "Can't stand the competition?"

But he followed obediently enough, and for the next hour or two was content to pick horses for his mother and make trips to the refreshment stands to score sodas, hot dogs, and fish and chips. But he wasn't good at picking winners. Ella, who was having a bad day, was getting more and more irritable. "What do you say, sport?" she asked her son. "Time to go home?"

"Ma! You promised! You said I could go up on top of the dome—"

"It's too windy," said his mother, "and I've got a bad feeling. We're going."

"Too windy" the boy might have argued with; his mother's bad feeling he did not. He simply sulked. On the drive back to the city, Bratislaw tried cheering him up with promises— "Another time, maybe? Maybe tomorrow?"

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But that tomorrow never came.

By the time Bratislaw finished parking the car, the storm had broken. He heard Ella yelling before he got inside the door of the apartment, and when he looked a question at the housekeeper, she only shook her head. The boy was in his room, hiding. Ella was screaming and throwing things in the living room. She paused only to scream at Bratislaw: "That son of a bitch! That Jew bastard crook!"

Her eyes were enormous, and the look she gave him was pure hatred. Bratislaw couldn't help flinching. "Is something wrong?" he managed.

"Wrong!" she shouted, and the next thing she threw was at him. He dodged a 1939 World's Fair souvenir ashtray and heard it splinter the mirror on the back door. "The son of a bitch froze himself, that's what's wrong! Look what I find waiting for me!" She jerked her thumb at the TV console, beeping softly and flashing its red urgent-message light. "Read it for yourself. And stay here until I come back."

She disappeared into her office and slammed the door behind her; the faint murmur told Bratislaw that she was on the phone, and no doubt shouting for the sound to come through those solid doors. He turned to the TV, which was set on one of the datafax channels, and read the news item:

FEDERAL JUDGE UNDERGOES CRYONIC SUSPENSION

Justice Horatio Margov was admitted to the Bronx General Suspension Facility at 5 P.M. this evening. A spokesman for the family issued a statement saying that the justice, who is sixty-one years old, had received a diagnosis of inoperable pancreatic cancer, and had elected to place himself in cryonic suspension until such time as surgical procedures for his condition, which at present are believed to carry a hazard of a more than 80 percent mortality rate, can be sufficiently improved to permit a cure. Justice Margov, sometimes called "Harlem's Hanging Judge," achieved a reputation as a crusading fighter against political corruption.

However, a source in the district attorney's office states that questions have been asked concerning Judge Margov's role in the current investigation of labor racketeering. "If he had not been frozen, he would have been asked some questions," said the source, adding that the district attorney's office has moved to sequester all of the judge's estate, including all documents. A full investigation is promised. Another spokesman for the district attorney's office, however, stated that the legally ambiguous position of a person in cryonic suspension will handicap further

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investigations.

When Ella came out of her office, She was no longer raging, but there was a frozen anger, and when Bratislaw tried to question her about, she simply said, "Wait awhile." She sat him down next to the ruins of the mirror, and herself sat across the room, smoking and refusing to answer questions. When the doorbell at last rang, she motioned to get it.

It was two goons from the hiring hall.

It was obvious that Ella had been expecting them. She didn't get up, or slow down the pace of her smoking, or even look surprised. She just said, "Go along with them, Bratislaw. You've got no choice." And then, just as the door was closing behind them, he heard, or thought he heard, one thing more:

"Good luck."

Good luck was what he needed. Once they got him down to the basement garage, they paused to work him over — not viciously, not with intent to maim him; one held him while the other punched him half a dozen times in the belly and chest and kidneys, then they reversed roles, and the other took his shots. It was bad, all right; it was as much pain as Bratislaw had ever felt, and when he was through vomiting and gasping, they pushed him into their car with the world swimming around him.

But they hadn't broken any bones.

It was because of that that when the car pulled up next to the union headquarters and his captors led him to the private entrance in back, Bratislaw did not resist. There was also the question of whether he would be able to, because their scientific beating had left his entire torso radiant with pain. As the guard at the private entrance slammed the door behind them, Bratislaw wondered if he would ever see the other side of it again; but that was only fear, not reason. Reason told him that if they wanted him dead, they would have found some better place to do it in.

They didn't, evidently, want him dead — at least not yet. They didn't even beat him any more. They took him to a room in the subbasement, and for a weird moment Bratislaw thought perhaps it was a clinic. Perhaps they were going to bandage him and poultice him and maybe even apologize to him for the misunderstanding. That was wrong, too. The "clinic" had other purposes. The two muscles sat down in one corner of the room and said nothing and did nothing further; the action was in the hands of three competent-looking people in white coats. They slipped a needle into Bratislaw's rump and wrapped him with tubing and strapped him with damp pads on arms and neck; and for three hours one of them asked him questions, from a written sheet, while the other two

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studied the traces of instrument pens on rolling paper.

They did not *tell* him anything at all. Not then, and not even when it was all over and they were whispering among themselves, while he was at last unstrapped and permitted to smoke a cigarette, and the hazy, giddy numbness that had struck him as soon as the needle went into his skin began to go away. Some things they didn't have to tell him, because the questions were themselves an answer. There had been a leak. Someone had evidence, somewhere, about the connection between Judge Margov and Ella Jennalec. The connection had something to do with an act of homosexual rape the judge had committed twenty-five years before; Ella was blackmailing him, and that was all new to Bratislaw. Perhaps his startled reaction when he was asked about that was the biggest factor in Bratislaw's favor. At last one of them disappeared to another room to make a telephone call. While they waited for him to return, Bratislaw had plenty of time to think; the clouds were lifting from his brain, the pain in his belly and ribs had not become less but had at least become familiar. He was in trouble. Ella was in trouble; she was suspended from all union offices, and therefore her personal attendant was down the tube no matter what else happened — no more job, no more draft exemption; the best he could hope for was that he would be allowed to live....

And he was. Without explanation; without apology. He was taken to the same rear door and pushed out onto the sidewalk, and the door closed behind him.

There was something he had to do. Whether doing it was smart was a whole other question. The answer would depend on how far and fast the word had spread. He pulled himself together, studied his face in a store window, brushed some dried flecks of something or other off his jacket, took his amulet off, wadded it with its chain in a pocket, and walked around to the front entrance.

The guard at the metal-detector nodded and waved him in through the private entrance. Vastly relieved, Bratislaw shook his head. "I just want to borrow your fluoroscope. We took this off a wise guy, and I want to look inside."

"Sure, Bratislaw." The guard took the amulet and put it on the rolling belt; Bratislaw crowded up beside him and looked at the CRT.

The image slid into view, the hard, dark picture of the gold chain, and the ghost of the amulet.

But the ghost had a skeleton. Two tiny reels, some wiring, a solid blot that was probably the recording head, the filmy outline of magnetic tape.

"Looks like you caught yourself a bugger," said the guard, smiling enviously.

"I guess so," said Bratislaw, trying

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to look triumphant when what he wanted to do was scream, or run, or hit something. Failing any of those, what he wanted most of all was a confrontation with the person who had got him into this mess. He wanted it badly, and right away.

VI

It was Heidi's good luck that she wasn't at home. All he found was a note on the CRT.

Night shift — I'll be back around 5 A.M.

But Bratislaw couldn't wait until 5 A.M. He couldn't go out again the way he was, either, so he stripped the clothes off his aching body, stood under the healing hot shower as long as the timer would allow, and dressed clean. Halfway through, he poured himself five ounces of scotch and sipped at it. It made him realize he hadn't eaten for nearly ten hours, so he broke two eggs into a pan; but before they had begun to cook, he changed his mind. He dumped the mess into the organic disposer, swallowed the rest of the scotch, and went downstairs to hail a cab.

The driver grumbled all the way through Brooklyn about having to leave a fare in the middle of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. Bratislaw didn't even listen. He was icy calm and walled inside his own thoughts, which were unpleasant. When they arrived at the pylon, he thrust the money at the woman, didn't wait for change, and headed for the pier elevator. "You got a pass, Mac?" the guard asked, but Bratislaw had his story all prepared. He shook his head.

"No pass, friend, but it's kind of an emergency. See, my wife's a controller topside. She's pregnant and she left her medicine at home. I sure don't want anything to go wrong. It's our first—"

Whether the guard was convinced or not, Bratislaw could not tell, but at least that got him into the elevator and up to the working levels. He had not expected to be let into the control tower itself, and wasn't. But he was put in a visitors' room with thick bulletproof glass between him and the controllers' room. He could see Heidi before a multicolored console, fingers dancing over a keyboard, speaking into the microphone pinned to her blouse. When the guard spoke to her, she glanced up at Bratislaw and nodded.

A few minutes later, her relief took over and she joined him in the room. "Hi, honey, what's up? I've only got ten minutes — this'll be my pee break."

"What's up," he said, "is you bugged me. I've been carrying a taper around in that amulet you gave me. You pretty nearly got me killed, and it could happen yet."

She nodded. It wasn't a frightened nod, or an apologetic one — not even a startled one; it was as though he had

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told her that the co-op had been out of swordfish and so he'd got salmon steaks for their dinner that night. Information received; reaction: none. She sat down on a bench facing him and folded her hands in her lap. "I was afraid they'd suspect you sooner or later," she said.

"Suspect me! They fucking *pulverized* me! They even scoped me."

She was nodding again in that same absent way. "Yes, I thought that might happen too. So it was better if you didn't know about the bug. That way you wouldn't have to try to lie."

"Heidi!"

Her expression still did not change, but two tears were gathering on her eyelids. She took a deep breath and said, "I've thought about what would happen when you found out — when they caught you, or whatever. You're entitled to know what it's all about." He laughed, sharp and bitter, but she did not respond, simply kept on with her prepared address. "Your boss is going to hold a pistol to the city's head. She wants to abolish the Universal Town Meeting, and she's going to do something violent."

"Come on, Heidi! Of course she's against it, but that doesn't prove she's going to do anything illegal."

"Proof was the trouble. My sister didn't have any," said Heidi, and the tears that slipped down her cheeks were replaced by two new ones. "She got that amulet made and she wanted me to get you to wear it. I refused. Then, when Ella Jennalec had her beaten up—"

"She didn't!"

"She did, and if you think about it, you'll know she did. Anyway, Lucy can't do it anymore. I have to do it for her. I've given every one of your tapes to the D.A."

Bratislaw gasped, appalled. "They'll kill me!"

"They'll give you protection if you agree to be a friendly witness."

"I'll be a friendly corpse!"

Steadfastly, Heidi said, "You have to take that chance, Jeff." She glanced at her watch. "I'm sorry, Jeff, but if I had to do it over again, I'd do it. Now we pregnant women have our problems, so I'd better use the rest of my break the way it was meant."

Bratislaw slept little that night. Before daylight he was up and dressed and out of the apartment, because he did not want to see his wife again. It wasn't that there were not things he wanted to say to her. What he feared was the things he might do to her.

That was not all he feared, for the day that was just dawning, in rain and wind, was full of things to be feared. The chances were excellent that he was unemployed; what would that do to his draft status? Surely Heidi would now tell the D.A. that he knew about the tapes; subpoenas would be flying, and what would he do about the one with his name on it?

He nursed a cup of coffee in a diner on the far West Side, gazing out

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at the skeletal dome building over the river and the rain lashing at it, and thought bleakly that none of those things were the worst. The worst was that when Jennalec found out what had actually happened, the thugs would no longer want information from him. They would want his life. And this day just beginning might quite possibly be the last he would ever see.

It took all the courage Bratislaw had to show up at Ella Jennalec's apartment at 7:30 that morning.

But the funny thing was that the day that had begun so badly brightened fast. Jennalec wasn't apologetic. The most you could say was that she was just, or trying to be, but it was more than Bratislaw had expected. "Mistakes happen, Jeff," she said, standing by the table, a slice of toast in one hand, hot coffee in the other. "Hazards of the trade. They thought it might be you that was talking."

Bratislaw opened his mouth, but she kept on talking. "You better not work for me anymore, though, Jeff. Pity. I'll miss you. But you wanted high-steel work, anyway, didn't you? And they're putting on extra shifts. The man you want to see is Woody Vult up at Governor's Island; he's expecting you ... better get up there right away."

And ninety minutes later, Jeff Bratislaw was working on the dome itself.

The rain was only an occasional sprinkle now, blown one way or another with the veering wind. Not a good day to go up on the bulging whaleback of steel framing that lay before Bratislaw, but the other men didn't seem worried about it, and the foremen shooed them all into the lift cage together. Bratislaw felt his chest try to settle into his gut as the acceleration hit. The lift wasn't straight up. It was up and over the great ground bulge of the skeletal dome, changing thrust as they climbed. The cage was gimbaled inside its split-cylinder shell, so the floor remained down. But the shell rocked like a carnival ride.

They stopped less than a third of the way up, and the men spilled out onto a stage. Bratislaw felt a hand on his shoulder. "You, too," said the foreman. "Shoe up!" And then, watching Bratislaw turn the dish-shaped plastic over in his hands in puzzlement: "Oh, shit. Come over here, you!" Out of earshot of the others, negligently touching with one hand a cable that Bratislaw was clinging to for dear life: "You ever been on the high steel before? No, I thought not. Damn that Ella!" He glared furiously at the other men, chattering among themselves, his face scowling while he thought. It was a dark face but not Negroid, and his accent was more New England than black. "I've got two choices. I can kick your ass off here. That's what I ought to do. Or I can take a chance that you'll kill

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yourself. Which do you want?"

What Bratislaw wanted he didn't want to say, since it was to be off that place where the wind thrust raggedly in all directions and the vents moaned and whistled and screamed. Woody Vult gave him what he said was the easiest job on the shell. It was to attach bundles of optical fibers to the structural members of the dome. When stressed, the transmission of laser-light through them varied and the strain registered on monitors below; when they broke, it called for a repair crew. So Bratislaw went out with his bowl-shaped shoes laced to his boots and a reel of colored sticky tape over one shoulder, dragging the fibers behind him as he pulled and rappelled himself across the dome with the handlines. It was a job for a man with at least three hands, preferably a man, like Vult, with Mohawk ancestry. Bratislaw had none of those. What he had was a determination to stick with it, and for the first hour, as he clung desperately and sweated fiercely and shook with fright, it didn't seem enough.

But as the day warmed and the sun came out, it began to seem not so bad. Bratislaw had never been so high in the open. Five hundred feet below, the bridge and the river were toys; out across Brooklyn and Queens, he could see planes taking off and landing and a thin knife-edge of blue that might be the Atlantic Ocean. All around him, on the swell of the dome, he could see other crews at work, sliding in the transparent panels and tacking them down, rappelling themselves with a grace and ease he so desperately envied. He couldn't do that. His grip on the lifelines was still tetanic. The others didn't fail to notice it, and when he returned for more cables every half hour or so, he was the butt of jokes. Sometimes advice, too, or even information: "One hand for you, one hand for the job —never forget it!" "Every hundred feet up means one extra mile per hour wind." "Push is cube of wind speed — twice as much wind, eight times as much push —you wait till it gets *strong,* boy!" And always, from the foreman: "You guys get your asses moving! We got a schedule to meet!"

The schedule wasn't important, really — construction jobs are *never* on schedule. What was important was the weather. If the dome had been covered in on time, there would have been no problem, for once it had its integrity, it was aerodynamically proof against winds of 200 miles an hour — more than had ever been recorded anywhere near New York by far. But with half the hexagonal panels in place and half missing, a really big wind would get right under and scoop it up. It would become an airfoil on its way to Oz —with, to be sure, hell's own mess of catastrophes left behind as pylons fell and cables snapped and great acre-sized sails tumbled and scraped across the city.

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So far the weather had spared them. But it was storm time.

"You! Bratislaw! What the hell do you think you're doing?" It was the foreman, Vult, scuttling up behind him. "Jesus, look at the way you've put them in, so loose the whole damn dome'll come down before they register!"

For nearly half an hour, Bratislaw had been concentrating on the work and the odd sense of satisfaction it gave him to be up so high and fear it so little, but all of a sudden he realized he was fifty stories high in a growing wind. "I'll do it over," he gasped.

"You'll do shit! I'll get somebody who knows what he's doing! Anyway, you're transferred up."

"Transferred up?"

"What I said! Jennalec wants you on top, and she sent somebody to get you." And Bratislaw turned and looked past the foreman, and there, coming toward them along the lifelines, was Tiny Martineau.

If Bratislaw had thought fast, he could have told the foreman to stick his job up his nose and made a safe, if unheroic, retreat. He didn't think fast. By the time he decided that was what he wanted to do, the foreman was well out of earshot and Martineau was grinning. "Up you go," he said comfortably, interposing his body between Bratislaw and the way down. Although the cast was off, he still favored that leg.

"Look, Tiny," Bratislaw began, measuring him for size. He wasn't as big as Martineau, but the difference wasn't much. In a fair fight they'd come out even enough—

"Up," grinned Martineau, and showed the blade in his hand. It was a sleeve knife, razor-sharp. The fight would not be fair. Bratislaw edged back and up, his eyes fixed on the steel.

"Tiny," he said, "you and Ella've got this all wrong. I don't know what you think, but I'll never testify!"

"Right," said Tiny cheerfully. "Just keep going up and we won't have any trouble."

That did not seem likely to Bratislaw, especially as there wasn't anything he could see up higher along the dome that was worth going to. They were getting out of the area where the plastic had been put in place, and his snowshoes had become useless. "I can't go any farther than this, Tiny," he said.

"Sure you can. Take off the shoes. We don't have much farther to go."

Bratislaw, one hand on the cable, bent down to release the lashings with the other. He kept his eyes on Martineau. It wasn't hard to do; there wasn't anybody else around to look at, and Martineau obligingly kept his distance.

As Bratislaw slipped out of the shoe, he missed his grip and the wind caught it. It sailed away, down through the open metalwork where the plastic had yet to go. Some citi-

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zen far below was likely to have a nasty surprise. "Tiny?" he offered. "I think we better talk to Ella."

Tiny shook his head regretfully. "She don't want to talk to you anymore, Jeffer," he said, uncoiling a cable from his waist. Bratislaw was surprised; it was a safety line, and for a minute he thought Martineau was about to offer it to him. Wrong guess. The big man clipped one end to the lifeline and the other to his belt.

"You can't do this!" Bratislaw yelled, retreating a step along the catwalk.

"Sure I can," grinned Tiny. "I got my orders from Ella, that's how I know it's O.K. Now, you just hold still a minute—"

And Bratislaw might have done it, monkey caught in the python's glare, but the wind was whistling around him and the chill steel was slippery; he moved away and stumbled. He fell flat on the catwalk, hugging it as he'd never hugged a woman, scared as he had never been in his life.

And there was Tiny Martineau galloping toward him. The knife was back in his sleeve, no longer needed to do the job he had come to do. The expression on his face was serious and thoughtful as he drew back a foot to kick Bratislaw loose from the catwalk.

It wasn't skill. It was terrified reflex. Bratislaw kicked first. He caught Martineau on the ankle that had been in a cast. The slippery steel slipped, the giant yelled in sudden rage and fright. He fell across Bratislaw, missed a grab for the steel. And was gone.

When Bratislaw looked over the edge of the catwalk, he could see Martineau dangling helplessly from his lifeline, fifty feet below, bobbing up and down and yelling, and wholly, completely unable to do anything to stop Bratislaw as, gasping, he got to his feet, retrieved the one remaining snowshoe, and slowly, carefully, slipped and clung his way back down the dome.

VII

When the baby was two weeks old, Heidi declared herself ready to travel and the child ready to be shown off to his aunt. They took the train to Peekskill and a taxi to the B-mod farm, and Lucy was waiting for them at the gate. She wasn't alone. She was pushing a wheelchair that contained a middle-aged women who lacked arms and legs. "I'm Dorothy," said the woman, "and I'm a kind of counselor here." The halt leading the dumb? thought Bratislaw, but said not a word. He didn't have to. Lucy's scrambled brains had not forgotten how to greet a new child, and she was stroking the sweet, soft cheek and burbling over the little snorts and sighs that were all John Fitzgerald Kennedy Bratislaw IV's vocabulary so far. "Nice kid," commented the woman in the wheelchair. She

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looked Bratislaw over carefully. She wasn't really without arms or legs, he saw, but they were no more than flippers at the shoulder, and what they were at the hips he could not see for the lap robe that covered her. But they surely were not full-scale legs. "Congratulations," she added.

"It's my wife's doing," he grinned.

"I don't mean the baby. I mean the trial."

"Oh. Yeah," said Bratislaw, but the time had passed when he preened himself at that kind of remark. Ella Jennalec's lawyer had been the old-fashioned kind. He didn't cross-examine. He pulverized. He tried every tactic a fertile imagination and a lenient court allowed him to demolish Bratislaw's credibility as a witness, and not the least of his weapons was the testimony, irrefutable because it was true, that Bratislaw had spent a lot of time in Jennalec's bed while his poor, pregnant wife worked overtime to pay for their debts and save money for the child. Of course it didn't change the outcome of the case. The amulet in Bratislaw's pocket had still been running, and Tiny Martineau's admission on tape that Jennalec had ordered the killing pushed the last reasonable doubt out of every juror's mind — not to mention all the other tapes, and all the other evidence from a dozen sources that had been building up the pattern of extortion and conspiracy and crime that had made the verdict easy.

Heidi Bratislaw was not an unusually jealous woman, but it had taken a lot of the easy trust out of the marriage. Not to mention what it had done to Lucy. "Yeah," said Bratislaw again, looking down at the sisters bent over his new son, "but to tell you the truth, I kind of wish none of it had happened, for all the trouble it caused." And Lucy looked up at him. The pleasure went out of her pretty, empty face. She bit her lip and contorted her cheeks. Her eyes squinted with the effort and her jaw trembled, but at last she got it out:

"Was worth it," she said.

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Books

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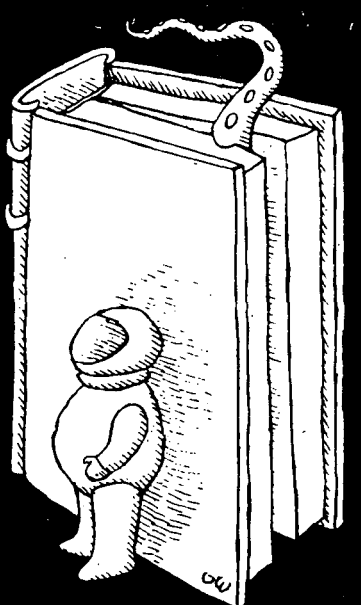

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

The Integral Trees, Larry Niven, Del Rey, $14.95

Exile on Vlabil, Ardath Mayhar, Doubleday, $11.95

The Herald, Michael Shaara, Avon, $2.95

News of a good Larry Niven book all by itself suffices to make 1984 a good year. As a matter of fact, however, Niven's is a very good book in a very good year.

He has done it again; deployed a fresh inventiveness he last showed so well in *Ringworld* (1970, which was quite some time ago). *The Integral Trees* fully makes up for a certain modichohum of laurel-resting that had crept into his work meanwhile; it zaps right along, combining expert action-plotting with a steady proliferation of science-borne extrapolation.

There are other kinds of SF, just as legitimate as the Niven kind, just as hard to do right, just as pure in their derivation from the classical roots of American newsstand SF. But this is the kind that immediately looks steffy to the neophyte, and, done right, convinces the newcomer that there is something particularly satisfying about our genre.* It's our trump card, and nobody can play it like Niven when he's interested.

What the people in *The Integral Trees* do is live in a doughnut-shaped cloud of air orbiting a neutron star. They don't live on a planet; they live

**It's not a genre, of course.*

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in the vegetation which has evolved in that air. The vegetation is edible. There is also quite an ecology full of native fauna, some of which people eat, some of which eats people. The major feature of this ecosystem is the huge "floating" trees, to which the people fled for refuge when things went wrong aboard a colonizing ramship. Mainly but not entirely in those trees, they have evolved a number of quasi-isolated barbarian cultures, and with that mechanism wound up and set in motion, Niven proceeds to tell us a wonderful page-turner suitable for children of all ages and degrees of education.

One of the most likeable things about Niven, to the contemporary ear, is the matter-of-fact existentialism with which his characters proceed. Super-sharp and often complexly educated, they are buoyed by apparently reflexive optimisms and a superficially simple faith that action is better than inaction. As readers, we respond to that very well.

It's amazing how the stuff endures. John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of *Astounding Science Fiction,* would have embraced Niven like a son in the 1940s. Here it is, forty years later —eight SF generations; an army has marched past. And still there is something powerful in it, even though in the intervening time we have evolved many a way of saying that no action can be good unless first founded on a social doctrine and no social doctrine can be implemented unless first vetted by committee.

Actually, the struggle between the individual impulse and the controls imposed by society is one of the classic dilemmas of life. Without society we are savages; with it, we are slaves. Or so the historical record shows. John Campbell's fiction used to assume that in the human galactic future, some means could be found to govern people without tyrannizing them. That's one of the basic tenets of his "Modern" Science Fiction, and without it you do not have the genuine article. Furthermore, government must be technological, inasmuch as technology offers the only Campbellian hope of a star-spanning culture. Thus ultimately technology is good for people. (Mind you, John was no blatantly arbitrary despot. The proposition was often affirmed in the testing — for example, with stories forerunning *The Integral Trees,* in which galactic distances *nearly* defeat central government.)

A more contemporary view is that a government big enough to rule the galaxy would inevitably be big enough to require crushing the individual, and in that sense Ardath Mayhar's *Exile on Vlahil* is a striking contemporary novel.

If so, why does it remind me of the works of C.S. Lewis?

In Mayhar's book, Ila Fazieh, exiled from the human culture, finds

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herself on a planet whose life-forms are immediately entranced by Mozart and who hail her introduction of the waltz as a permanent beneficial revolution fully comparable to what would happen if, say, a stranded alien taught us all how to do telepathy.

Fazieh is the young wife of a man earlier also condemned to exile by the Instrumentality, the computerized (and hence inflexible) bureaucracy that rules many fully settled planets and an ever-expanding frontier among the stars. By matter transmitter, she is sent to Vlahil, certainly not the same place where her husband was sent. She is the first human intentionally placed on this little-known but as it turns out lushly pastoral planet capable of supporting humanoid life. She is given some supplies, a rudimentary shelter, and little else. Her prospects are apparently bleak, although at the last moment her supportive father finds some way to slip her a computerized companion, named Alice, who is a black box containing the complete personality and education of an antibureaucratic librarian. Additionally, somewhere in the general galactic vicinity may be a lost two-man scout ship. But this is also not a realistic expectation of physical community, since scouts are highly conditioned, narrow-purpose instruments, not much more congenial than the many machines guided by implanted human brains. (The source of both scouts and servobrains is the large pool of children reared in the Instrumentality's creches; children who show too much initiative provide the brains.)

What Ila almost immediately finds on this planet, however, is a highly civilized and complexly interactive multispecies society of enormous — in fact, unremitting — charm. The Ered, a somewhat dumpy-looking mute but telepathic species of primates, appear at first to be simply the plebian underlings of the spectacular Vla, who are gorgeous large intelligent avians. But in fact it is the Ered, broadcasting moods of peace and harmony, who have made an Eden of Vlahil's major continent. There is no predation, from one end of the ecochain to the other; even the gentlest handmouse or earbear has nothing to fear from the spiders, for example. The Vla, swooping and singing, gracefully embody a sort of Hellenistic culture; they have radio, we quickly learn, and in due course we learn their eyrie is an elaborate city, carved by the diligent Ered, and furthermore they, too, have matter-transmission, though of course it's not the gray thing deployed by the Instrumentality.

Furthermore, we learn they are in actual contact with the gods. The gods — who quickly point out that they are simply omniscient superbeings working out their way (along the Karmic wheel?) under the tutelage of higher powers — can and do affect the Instrumentality as well as

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the Vla, the Ered, and all other things everywhere. Swiftly, because Ila has Alice play classical music for them, and teaches the Ered to waltz, all this is woven into one harmonious structure of mutual approbation. Around about this point the experienced SF reader must realize that the Instrumentality is doomed, its reflexive machinations crumbling hopelessly under the avalanche of this huge stack of cards. So what began as an often touching and certainly delightful tale has rather apallingly degenerated into one of those things where right-thinking beings prate right-thinkingly to each other, their nobility validated by impenetrable unexamined self-rightousness.*

It's beside the point here that what begins so well as a story does not end as an at least well-proposed tract. This is not a new sort of disappointment in SF. What is to the point is that if you look closely, the Instrumentality does nothing technological —including the pressing of brains into mechanical servitude — that is not done by the Instrumentality's foes, however feathered. But the one technology is awful and the other is good; sexual sorting is oppressive when pursued by the Instrumentality, and all totalitarianism is bad, unless it is broadcast by the Ered at the behest of the gods.

As I said, this sort of pasteboard Utopian writing is not unfindable in Sf of any era, though it does not always begin so well as to disappoint so regrettably. But I have a strong hunch that Mayhar speaks for a considerable proportion of the SF community — or, putting it I think more accurately, to a strong component within all of us. If Mayhar had done a more rigorous job of defining a difference between good tech and bad tech —presumably somewhere along the lines of biotechnology as opposed to the sort where you can see the rivets with a naked eye — this would have seemed a correspondingly better book. What I'm saying is that for all its pastoral signatures, this is nevertheless a book that by first intention speaks only to the technophile. If it speaks to any antipathy toward technology as the medium of universal of order, it speaks so only to those who have not been properly taught to read.

Along these lines, Michael Shaara's *The Herald* is a must-read book that raises a profound question: If you could survive it, would you endorse some clean method of wiping out over 99 per cent of the world's population overnight?

No, wait — think about it ... maybe you *wouldn't* want to.

And yet, on the other hand.... Well,

And by what seems to be a serious proposal that societal tensions would be expunged if we only had the decency to keep males and females totally separated except at mating time.

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whatever, *imprimis* this powerful book with its neatly lyrical prose endorses the prevalent cultural suspicion that our problems have gotten so big, only universal measures implemented by universal tech capability could possibly ameliorate things. Already well into technophilia, *ipso facto,* although, again, there is good tech and bad tech.

Good tech is the old Stinson Voyager rebuilt into flyable condition by competent middle-twentyish Nick Tesla with his own two hands. In it, he is flying to his old Gulf Coast home town with a girl after a romantic interlude. Good tech is magic carpet.

(And, no, the apparent reference to 1920s scientist Nicola Tesla is apparently just a coincidence, although I would have thought Shaara far too conscious a writer for the sort of accidental red herring this seems to be.)

Shaara's Tesla is, in fact, far nearer being identical with Hemingway's Nick Adams than he is to any Gernsbackian coil-winders. He is a student of the world; when it turns out that something in the city of Jefferson now gives people fatal plague symptoms with catastrophic swiftness, Nick's reaction boils down to watching it happen.

Yes, he is seriously upset when the girl vomits and dies shortly after he finally lands at Jefferson's mysteriously unresponsive airport. But he was not so heavily involved with her that he is incapacitated by his emotions, which soon fade into a background regret and then disappear. If you are thinking that one more death in addition to 70,000 is, after all, something one would look at in proportion, you are thinking along the right lines. There is also, of course, his involvement with the fact that he is not dead, or even dying, although a mysterious electric tingle does seem to be coursing through his body.

The initial suspect for all these phenomena, of course, has to be bad tech in some as yet undifferentiated form. Although it is not clear why these things are happening, clearly only technology can act on such a ale, or leave such clean edges as we me to see. It turns out the pattern of death is perfectly concentric with Jefferson and stops abruptly, leaving incoming TV and radio to show Nick an America living as usual, unaware, with only the barest first hand hints that soon the American bureaucracy will be forced to notice an appalling void in its hegemony.

After one night in Jefferson, Nick is ready to leave. There are few visible corpses; the death came at night, when most of the 70,000 were snug in their beds. Nevertheless, in this semitropical climate, there is a gathering scent on the wind. On the ground now, Nick heads north, and runs into the *cordon sanitaire* that has been quickly thrown around the

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circle of death by the Army and by Richard Ring, a civilian.

There is a General Armitage, and there is a scientist named Corelli, but not Marie Corelli — peculiarly, he is a sort of pleasant version of the omnivorously self-propelling real and not charming Nicola Tesla. No question, though, that Richard Ring is your antagonist here. Mysterious in political power, he possesses that great credential, the absence of overt credentials. He is what we think of when we think "C.I.A.," and he is also what we hope for among C.I.A. men, for he is educated and just a little bedevilled by his importunate superiors. We can readily mistake him for a buffer between us and the bureaucracy, but in fact he is its cutting edge.

Radiation, he tells Nick. Some form of controlled radiation is emanating from the science building of Jefferson's hitherto insignificant little college, and apparently a very few people are resistant to it. Given a radio, a car and a gun, Nick is sent back in to report what he can find at the science building. There is reason to suspect the involvement of a highly charismatic socially-conscious scientist named Shepherd, who does not work for the government. Are we to have it reinforced to us that good tech is personally-crafted tech directed by self-willed individuals? A personal tech that slays by thousands in the night, and leaves — as we will see — one surviving maternity ward infant to then starve to death in its cradle?

Back Nick goes, radioing Ring periodically, to find the infant but also about a dozen living survivors.

These are an interesting bunch. They are all people who don't really need society in order to be what they are. Some are retired, and have taken to luncheons on the lawn, exchanging smiles and polite greetings with passersby. One is an old musician, who just drives around in an old Ford, taking in the sights. (The preferred vehicles, however, are commandeered police cars.) One is a young woman whom Nick finds locked in a jail cell, she having been put there in protective custody following a suicide attempt. Her name is Ruth.

By now you can't be sure whether you're still in Jefferson or aboard the *S.S. San Pedro*. Though Shaara's style seems to be no more than an especially literate version of standard docudrama prose,* there is clearly a great deal of conscious subtextualizing being performed here — again on a 1930s model but again on a good one.

However that may be, on one level Shaara's novel succeeds brilliantly.

**The dialogue technique, as an instance of special expertise in this mode, is strikingly unlike the characteristic* patois *of George V. Higgins, yet is just as convincing. I think you could get to it by reading tape transcripts assiduously over a long period of time, but I have no reason to believe that's how Shaara arrived at it.*

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The world of Jefferson after the death is a cleaner, most pleasant place; a peaceable kingdom. And I do not think this is simply because Shaara forces us to flirt with that idea; rather it is largely because he, an old SF hand returned from the Post-Modern days of the 1950s, senses and reflects something that we have all flirted with all along. And I think it is relevant here to know that as a young writer, Shaara was already a former police officer, with many social observations as well as reservations under his cartridge belt.

Rationally, his proposed society is no more viable than Mayhar's. It can work even for a few days only because all the radiation-immune people have internalized individualities; there are no surviving bureaucrats in Jefferson, and no one else who would be lost without cards of identity. No one in this book ever explains satisfactorily — or even less than ludicrously — how the "radiation" works or how one gains immunity to it. But clearly all totalitarian-dependent occupational specialties are 100% fatal. (Whereas being an animal means you can laugh at the rain, at least until the stalled oxen among you begin to starve to death, the unmilked cows begin to groan, and the feral dog packs burst in.)

Actually, these are only the opening cards in an elaborate thought-experiment Shaara lays out around our psyches. They are, I think, the better-drafted cards, but many good ones follow and the author's intention is neither unambitious nor simplistic.

The feral dog packs go away once Shaara no longer needs them for an exciting scene. You will have deduced that the smell of death also promptly abates. There are no real explanations for this, anymore than James Gould Cozzens ever told us exactly why the deckhand drove a pickax into the Pontiac stencil once he realized the *San Pedro* had been sinking even before it left harbor. Jefferson is not a real place. And yet, it stands for a real place, I'm convinced, located in our mind of minds. We are aware of its fragility — Shaara says, several times, that it can't last. But in truth we surely believe it is invulnerable and indestructible, because we have been eagerly consuming post-Armageddon stories at least since the days of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Last Man,* and there is frankly far from enough rational material in Last Person stories to justify anything like one percent of the verbiage that has been expended on them.

What Shaara has done is to touch directly, consciously, on this dream which we usually just sidle up to. There are signatures all over the book that proclaim he is deliberately evoking our desire to roam free in the vast room that technology has opened to — unfortunately — too many of us.

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And he is asking us that question plain. If we could only get rid of ... how many? ... would the world of power boats, powered cities, unpowered store alarms and bedizened power vehicles seem so oppressive? How, in truth, would it seem? It is a question that seems aptly raised by a poet who, in his youth, carried the baton, the come-along, the cuffs and the gun, all hung about his body and decked by the badge; a blue lensman who has grown contemplative.

In the end, Ruth is slain.

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Lisa Tuttle is a regular F&SF contributor who lives in England and has just completed a new novel titled GABRIEL. Her specialty is the contemporary tale of terror; see, for example...

Redcap

BY
LISA TUTTLE

Off the main road, Carter walked into silence. Wonderful, he thought, to find such solitude in crowded, civilized Britain. It was like traveling back in time. The peaceful border country was especially appealing after two hot weeks of sight-seeing in London.

According to his guidebook, the castle should be less than a mile away, but he could see nothing but dark green conifer forest on both sides of the road.

"A haunted, uncanny, wicked place," the girl in the pub last night had called it. Carter wasn't superstitious, but he liked hearing her talk. To provoke her he said he intended to camp out in the castle ruins.

"You'll never!" she cried in alarm. "Oh, no, once you see it for your own self, you'd never want to pass the night there. It's a wicked place. The stones are soaked with blood."

The old lord who built the castle had been a sorcerer, she told him, who kidnapped and murdered babies. He used his magic to terrorize the local people and pile up treasure. Finally, for his sins, he was boiled in oil.

"So he's dead," said Carter. "His ghost can't hurt me."

"It's not the old lord you need to be afraid Of — but Redcap. Redcap still guards the treasure, as his master bid him. And Redcap will never die."

Carter rounded a bend and saw the castle, the top of it projecting through the trees: jagged black stone, sharp-edged as the teeth in a monster's gaping mouth.

The silence suddenly seemed unnatural. There were no birds singing, and no breeze stirred. The only sound was the low mutter of rushing water from somewhere out of sight.

Carter shifted the weight of his

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bedroll, trying to ignore the tension in the pit of his stomach, the sudden reluctance to continue. In his mind's eye he could see the goblin the girl had described to him, see it as clearly as he saw the ragged stone jaws of the castle: a stocky, powerful little man with long yellow teeth and glowing red eyes. The girl's voice rang in his ears, a voice straight out of the bloody, fearful past: "His cap is red because he dyes it in the blood of his victims."

A car passed, a sudden flash of color, noise, and dust heading toward the main road. Five minutes earlier Carter would have resented it, but now, even though it made him jump, he was glad to be reminded so forcibly of the twentieth century.

He looked at the cloudless sky, remembering his plan to sleep out, to save money, unless the weather turned. Still, there were probably laws against camping on government property. He didn't have to keep a drunken boast made to a girl he would never see again. He walked on, and the castle was hidden by the forest.

A narrow, fast-flowing river churned and bubbled over rocks to his right, rushing down the hillside to follow the course of the road. The trees thinned, and there, on the other side of the river, stood the castle.

It was not the ruin he had imagined, although it was roofless. The walls — dark, weather-streaked stone — looked as solid as the day they were built. It was a high, square, sturdy fortress, not very large. The "teeth" were jagged crenellations rising to a point at the top of each side.

As he approached, Carter saw an elderly couple standing beside a white car parked on the grassy verge. He nodded at them as he passed, going through the wooden gate and up the path. Behind him he heard the sound of a car being started and driven away, and he felt the silence descend upon him once more.

A wooden shed with a Department of the Environment sign on it marked the end of the path. On a campstool in front of the door sat a gray-haired, heavyset man in khaki.

"Hello," Carter said. "Not too late, am I?"

The guard looked him carefully up and down, then shook his head. "Not too late. We're open until sunset, by law, but no one ever comes that late. No one wants to be caught here after dark."

Carter grinned. "You mean ghosts?"

"No, I don't mean ghosts."

"I met this girl last night," Carter said. "She seemed to think this place was haunted. She said a lot of people had been murdered here."

"That's true enough."

"She said that at night their screams and cries could still be heard." The man shrugged. "I've never seen any ghosts. Or heard them."

"You've been here at night?"

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"Of course. It's my duty to look after the place. I've nothing to fear."

Carter fumbled in his pocket for change. "I'll take a ticket and ... is there a book about the castle? A history?"

"No, and there should be. I could write one myself, if I had the gift for writing. I know more about this castle than anyone else alive, and that includes all your book-writing history professors! I could tell you some stories...."

"Maybe when I come out," said Carter. "I'm interested in history."

The guard looked at him again, a little too searchingly for Carter's taste. "What've you got in that rucksack?"

"Just — things," he said defensively.

"Must be heavy, carrying it around all day. Why don't you take it off and leave it here while you look around the castle? You needn't worry. I'll look after it for you. It will be safe with me."

It would have seemed ungracious to refuse, Carter thought, almost an insult. Besides, his few valuables — passport, money, camera — were in his pockets or slung around his neck. And as he shrugged off the backpack and handed it over, he realized it had become a burden. It was a relief to move unencumbered. "Hey, thanks a lot. I won't be too long."

"Take your time," said the guard. "I'll wait for you."

Carter walked up toward the castle, feeling uneasy. No doubt about it, the place had an evil atmosphere. He couldn't put his finger on a reason —it just seemed to be in the air. Probably some places were naturally like that, due to negative ions or underground water, he thought; or maybe there was something in the idea that violent deeds left a trace behind. He wondered if the guard felt it, working here every day as he did. Was he immune to it, or had he learned to ignore it?

The heavy wooden door on one side was locked, but on the other an identical door had been wedged open with a lump of stone. Entering, Carter saw that the interior was less well preserved than he had expected. Walls had crumbled away in places, and chunks of rock littered the earth floor. Wooden beams and floorboards had long since deteriorated, like the roof, so stone stairways rose to emptiness. Carter liked the look of the steps climbing to nothing, and took several photographs from different angles. He investigated odd corners and climbed up and down, taking more pictures and enjoying himself, forgetting that odd prickling sensation in the interest of the moment. Outside, he took shots of the ruin from all sides and finally, reluctantly, went back to the guard's hut.

"Like it?"

"You bet! That old well especially. I only wish I could have seen it when it was being used, you know,

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how people lived in it. How long was it occupied?"

The guard rattled off names and dates, giving a potted history that Carter barely took in. He was noticing the length of the shadows on the grass, and wondering how soon it would be dark.

"Uh, sorry to interrupt," Carter said. "But I need to find a place to stay the night. You wouldn't happen to know of anybody around here who does bed and breakfast?"

The man stared at him. "Nobody lives around here. Did you see anybody on your way? No, they wouldn't build their houses too close to the castle — not *this* castle. Out of fear. But why do you want to pay for a bed when you've got your kit with you? It will be a fine, dry night, and the moon full. When I saw you coming up the path, I said to myself, there's one who'll be asking permission to camp out. Mind you, I couldn't let you stay inside the actual castle. I'll lock that up proper before I go home, as I always do. But I don't mind if you want to sleep outside the walls."

"No, not tonight," Carter said. "I do sleep out a lot, but I don't have any food with me, so I'll have to hike to the nearest village for a meal, and then I won't feel like coming back all this way." He felt pleased with himself for coming up with such a good excuse.

"Ah, so you are afraid." The beginning of a satisfied smile appeared.

The guard's expression annoyed Carter. "I'm *not* afraid. I don't believe in ghosts."

"It wasn't ghosts I meant. It wasn't ghosts killed the last ones."

"The last ones?"

"The last who spent the night here. They didn't believe in ghosts either, that man and that woman with their tent and their Primus stove and their—"

"When was that?" Dimly, he recalled something the girl in the pub told him. He'd found it hard, listening to her, to judge how long ago the things she spoke of had happened.

"Oh, five years ago. You hadn't heard of it? A shocking thing, in all the papers ... but I suppose in America you have enough of your own murders without importing ours."

"Who killed them?"

"Who, indeed? Their throats were slit with a knife."

"A robber?"

"No robber."

Carter glanced at the sun, low and glinting redly through the trees. "Look," he said. "I'm sure it's an interesting story, but I would like to find a place to stay tonight—"

"But not here, eh? Not on Redcap's ground."

"Redcap!"

"Aye, Redcap. He carries the keys and guards the treasure just as the old lord set him to do. Still here, still killing strangers to dye his cap."

"I've heard the legend," Carter

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said. "Very colorful. But I don't believe in the supernatural, in ghosts and goblins. The reason I don't want to stay has nothing to do with Redcap, or the people who were murdered here five years ago."

"You'd believe if you saw them. If you saw what *I* saw."

"You saw them. After they were dead?"

"Oh, yes." The guard nodded. "I could tell you a story...."

"I need to get started walking. I don't want to miss dinner," Carter said, ignoring the tickle of interest the man's words had stirred in him.

"Don't worry about it," the guard said. "There's a farmhouse not too far from here where they know me. If I take you to them, they'll give you a bed for the night and even cook you supper. Mrs. B's a fair cook, too. Just wait for me." He touched the keys hanging at his belt. "The sun's setting and I must lock up. No one else will come now. Wait here for me."

Carter watched the man walk away, feeling the urge to run for it. But where would he run? He remembered that long stretch of forest road behind him. He didn't know what lay ahead, but the guard had offered to take him to a farmhouse. How silly to run away from a good offer, to pay attention to that irrational prickling down his back.

He stepped into the wooden hut and looked around. It was tiny, but the walls had been fitted with built-in shelves, and it was well equipped for a man who must wait here all day. There was an electric kettle, mugs, a teapot, a box of tea bags, a bottle half-full of milk, a small sack of sugar, a roll of digestive biscuits, a radio, some magazines and books, a deck of cards, boxed jigsaw puzzles, extra clothes —all the comforts of home. His own gear was on the floor beside the wall, and as he knelt down beside it, something caught his eye, glinting on a shelf, out of place among a pile of clothing. Without thinking, Carter reached out.

It was a knife, he thought at first, but then he had it in his hand and could see that it was only the hilt. It was a heavy, ornate, iron hilt without a blade. It looked very old, the sort of thing Carter could imagine seeing in a museum, behind glass, the blade reconstructed in plaster, with a typed card giving its history.

Suddenly nervous, Carter thrust the hilt to the back of the shelf, hiding it, and stood up. Through the open door he saw the guard approaching.

"Sit there," the man said, nudging his campstool farther onto the path. "I'll make us a cup of tea before we go. I never set out for home without a cup of tea inside me."

"Maybe you could give me directions," Carter said, edging past. "Just tell me where—"

"I said I'd take you, and I will. Now sit. I've got another stool for me."

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Carter looked at the looming dark mass of the castle and wished himself elsewhere, but he sat down.

"I was telling you about the murders," the guard said some minutes later, handing Carter a steaming cup and settling down beside him. "It was a married couple, as I said, and a child. The boy wasn't their own. They'd taken him on out of charity. It came out later that his real father had been done for murder. Of course, I didn't know that at the time, but afterward it made sense of something she said, about not believing in heredity. She believed in the socializing process, and she was going to socialize that boy good and proper, make him into a weedy little vegetarian pacifist.

"That's what *they* were, you see. Or at least, she was. She did all the talking. Did she talk! When I gave them permission to stay the night, of course I told them about Redcap. I had to ask them if they knew — it wouldn't have been right to let them stay, unknowing.

"She as much as called me simple to my face. Went on about reason and logic, didn't want the boy to hear such nonsense.

"I felt sorry for the kid, I can tell you, having to put up with all that from her. While those two were setting up camp, I had a chat with the boy. I gave him a biscuit — not like these, I had chocolate-covered ones that day — and would you believe it? He scoffed half the roll. And he ate up my stories, too. He'd never heard the like all about magic and murder. He thought history was dull, dry dates. In his house they didn't believe in fairy stories, which meant no comics, no television, no *fun*. He took it all very serious. He didn't know how to laugh, I don't think.

"After I told him about Redcap, he didn't want to stay. He had more sense than his people, but of course they wouldn't listen to him. No matter what he said, they would stay. That woman was furious with me for putting nonsense into his head, as she put it. She said no one had ever lied to him before; she believed in telling children the truth and only the truth. The last thing I heard as I left was her telling him to stop crying and forget the silly stories that bad man had told him, and to put on his pajamas, and not to forget it was damp out, so he must wear his socks and his nightcap as well. His nightcap! I ask you....

"I was the one who found them, of course, in the morning." He stared into the shadows, as if seeing it all again.

Carter looked into his untasted tea, feeling his heart pounding with a kind of sick excitement. The silence stretched on, lengthening like the shadows, and he finally had to ask.

"How ... how exactly did you find them?"

"I saw the woman first — the man was in the tent. I saw her lying on the

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ground, all bloody, and the kid crouching over her. I thought he was trying to help her, at first. Then I saw what it was. He had his little nightcap in his hands, and he was dipping it into the wound in her throat.

"He looked up at me, holding it up. 'I'm making it like *his*,' he said. 'Red, just like his.'"

Carter could almost feel the darkness thickening the air around them, wrapping them in silence. He had to clench his teeth to keep from shivering. "What ... what about the police?"

"I had to call them, of course. The boy was their only witness, but also their only suspect. They didn't believe the story about a little man with glowing red eyes and long yellow teeth, with a red cap pulled down over his long, shaggy hair. If this person had cut two throats, why had he left the boy untouched?

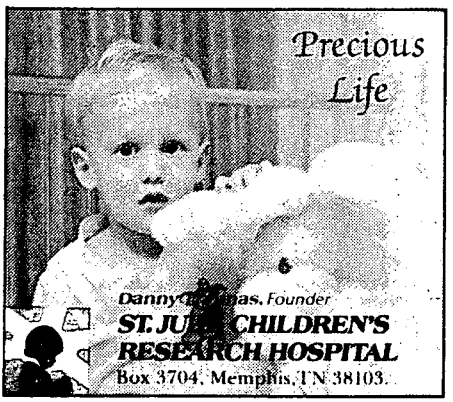
"He had the answer. He held out his nightcap, stiff with his mother's blood. 'I was wearing this,' he said. 'It was just like his. He grinned at me, and he touched his cap and pointed to mine. Then he disappeared. He left me because he thought we were the same. Because of the cap. He thought I was like him.' And he smiled, so pleased to have worked it out.

"But the police don't go for stories about people who disappear. And he was their only suspect, even though he wasn't really strong enough to have cut a throat like that — the woman had struggled, and she was a big, strong woman, too. But they ignored that because it was simpler to keep it in the family. There was just one problem."

The tenor of the man's voice changed, and Carter looked at him. In the last, late rays of the setting sun, the guard's eyes glowed a deep, dangerous red. Carter stared and could not look away.

"The murder weapon. They never found it. They never found my knife." He grinned, showing long, yellow teeth.

And then it was really dark.



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Ms. Robins' first F&SF appearance is a superior story about an abandoned child who turns into something quite extraordinary. The author writes: "I am a New Yorker, currently working in an investment bank, the latest in a series of jobs designed to keep a roof over my head while I write. I have published in Asimov's SF Magazine *and have also published four historical novels."*

Cuckoo

BY

MADELEINE E. ROBINS

Tannesburg was too small to have an orphanage. When the hired man from Sarah Eamons's place found a baby swaddled tightly in grimy cloth and propped against a tree at the edge of Miss Eamons's property, he brought it with him into town and left it with the doctor. And although the village was not yet connected to the new telephone line, Tannesburg had an efficient grapevine, and Miss Eamons had heard all about the foundling and the way it had squalled, tucked under Pete Hargill's arm like a laundry bundle, long before Pete returned to work the next day. Then Sarah called at the doctor's house, justifying her curiosity with a sense of responsibility: Had not the baby been abandoned beneath her elm trees for anyone to find?

Mrs. Pratt, the doctor's wife, ushered Sarah upstairs to the second-best bedroom to see "the little stranger," hastily accommodated in a makeshift crib. Mrs. Pratt went on about the child in nursery-room whispers, her voice squeezed high and girlish from her tight-corseted body, waving her hands with their accompaniments of lace and floating cambric while Sarah looked at the baby. She had expected a pudgy infant with a vapid baby's face, but he was not like that. Even in sleep the tiny face was narrow, bony, with eyes set deeply below dark arched brows, and large elfin ears. Above his high, slanting forehead there was a dark thatch of coarse hair; about him altogether an air of strangeness, of slight deformity. As she looked at him, Sarah felt pity, and that vague wistfulness that sometimes hurt her at the sight of a baby. Then the child opened his eyes and stared soundlessly up at her, and

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Sarah felt a shock of familiarity run through her. They watched each other for a long moment; the baby's eyes were violet.

"... and so ugly, poor little thing. Who's to take care of him is what I want to know, Miss Eamons. We've no provision for this sort of thing; Doctor and I cannot be expected — after all, I'm not a young woman anymore, and my health—"

Sarah turned away from the crib. "I'd take him, Mrs. Pratt," she said. "I'd like to."

While the ugly child in his crib slept, the ladies went down to the parlor, and Mrs. Pratt gave Sarah the first of many lectures she would hear on the folly of adopting the boy. What business had a maiden lady, no matter if she was barely thirty and well-to-do, to be raising a child like that, a boy, and a stray, too, parents the Lord knows who?

Sarah heard the words over and over. Tannesburg had a certain pride in Miss Eamons, living in the old white house settled in acres of green lawn; as they would have protected Sarah from ruffians and outsiders, they now tried to protect her from the baby — only Sarah refused to be protected. From the first moment, sitting cool and smiling in Mrs. Pratt's fussy parlor, her determined civility would not be persuaded.

She took the boy home within the week, bought a crib and baby clothes, toys, made arrangements for the daughter of the livery stable man to come and help with extra chores at the house. The boy was christened Joseph. Sarah spent hours sitting, watching him, playing with him, looking for the flash of something turbulent in his violet eyes. Two weeks after his discovery, Tannesburg was distracted from the subject of Miss Eamons and her foundling by the incursion of a horseless carriage into the streets; gradually the adoption ceased to be a nine-days' wonder.

Joe grew slowly, small for his age. Neither Sarah's encouragement nor the cook's ingenuity could fill out his frame or plumpen his narrow face. His nose grew long and bony, incongruous in a child's face, and his elfin ears grew larger, pronouncedly pointed. There was also a deformity, twin ridges of bone parallel to his spine that began just below the shoulder blades. When he walked, Joe carried himself hunched forward slightly.

Children in the town, even the gentlest of them, called him names. It might have been expected: his odd looks and violet stare were disconcerting, his voice was harsh and croaking. Sooner or later someone would give in to the temptation to play a trick on the dummy, taunt him, make him cry. When he was old enough to start at school, the teasing briefly became worse, and Joe returned from school every day bruised and dirty and stubbornly silent. Just when Sarah thought she would have to do some-

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thing, take steps, the boy learned an odd knack for effacing himself, avoiding the troublemakers, and the trouble lessened.

Through the fights Sarah had watched, afraid to interface or even comfort too much. Even as a very little boy, Joe had a manner that dismissed sympathy; Sarah had recognized that at once; it was something they shared.

Though Miss Eamons and her boy became a common place, they were never wholly taken for granted. Married women from town called at the big white house from time to time to advise her about raising the boy, certain that even the best-intentioned maiden lady could not raise up a boy without guidance.

They came, in complicated afternoon dresses draped and bustled over important figures, carrying parasols and beaded reticules, and balanced teacups as they lectured. "Boys, Miss Eamons: you can't wrap them in cotton wool. My Teddy, for instance—"

They gave her the benefit of their experiences graciously, and if Joe stopped in the parlor for a moment on his way out to play, they smiled generously on him, disconcerted by the tenderness at the corner of Miss Eamons's mouth and the gentleness of her hand on his hair. "Children must take their share of lumps, Miss Eamons," the ladies would tell her when he had left. "You can't be too easy with them just because..."

The 'just because' would drift off uncomfortably, and after a little while, the ladies would finish their tea and go, between discomfort and virtue. Sarah Eamons was a maiden lady; what did she know about raising boys? And such an odd boy. It must be such a quiet life for the child. Neither of them would have recognized Sarah Eamons an hour later, running in lunatic circles across the lawn near the wood, playing a ruleless game of catch-as-catch-can with Joe, laughing, breathless, until Joe reached up to overbalance her, knocking her to the ground.

"Mama?" He circled back, just out of reach, to where Sarah lay gasping, a splash of white linen on the grass. For just a moment his eyes were dark and serious, alarmed. "Mama, are you all right? I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You can't wrap your Mama up in cotton wool, Joey," she sputtered, laughing. Sarah got shakily to her feet again. "But I do think it's time for dinner."

By the time they reached the house, hand in hand, Sarah was listening seriously to a story of Joe's; when Carrie, one of the hired girls, met them on the sun porch, they unclasped their hands as if by mutual consent, and Sarah sent him off to clean up for dinner.

In the evenings they sat on the sun porch at the back of the old house if it was warm, with Joe by Sarah's feet, leaning against her chair,

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near enough so that she could touch his shoulder as they talked, so that he could turn and bump his forehead against her knee, his awkward caress. When the weather turned cold, they moved indoors and sat together on an old red davenport, reading together, inspecting picture books of English castles, Russian mosques, French cathedrals with vaulted ceilings and odd carved figures guarding the downspouts and doorways. Sometimes Joe made up stories for Sarah's benefit, or she would talk about growing up, about her parents, about waiting for something special that had never come.

Once he asked Sarah why she had never married. She thought seriously before she replied; her answers to his questions were always considered. She and Joe were sitting that evening on the sun porch, washed with sounds: clatter of the hired man carrying coal for the new patent furnace; a rattle of supper dishes from the kitchen; a bird's call from the woods; the silvery click of Sarah's knitting needles. She was making a scarf for the boy; bright blue wool spilled down the front of her long white skirt. On the faded oriental rug at her feet, Joe sat playing a game with twigs and stones. Sarah looked up at last, past the barn toward the trees that hemmed the north edge of the lawn. She smiled and admitted, "I suppose I never thought the last man who asked me would be the last man who asked me."

The boy accepted the logic of that. "There were lots of them that asked; didn't you like any of them?" He clicked two stones against each other so that one jumped into the air and was lost in Sarah's skirts.

"Oh, well, ***like***. I ***liked*** some of them. But not one of them specially," she explained, still watching the border of wilderness. "They'd come on Sunday to take me buggy riding, or sometimes sit right here on the porch with me, watching the sunset."

"And?" The boy looked up at Sarah, frankly trying to reconcile her with a woman fifteen years younger, a Miss Eamons with beaux and a flirtatious manner.

"And nothing, love. As soon as the sun began to set, Carrie would rattle dishes inside and they'd realize it was dusk, and me a single lady with no chaperone, and they'd do what was proper and take their leave." Sarah's eyes dropped from the woods to her knitting, from green to blue. "No one ever stayed past dusk," she murmured, more to herself than for the boy.

At her feet Joe nodded again and returned to his game. Sarah, looking down at his stooped shoulders and narrow head, smiled and returned to her knitting. It was as if, she thought, they had to know each other very well, as if each was learning the other even when they were quiet; then it was as if they were hermits sharing the silence companionably, watching, waiting.

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When he was eleven or so, Sarah noticed that the bony ridges on Joe's back were getting larger. The skin over them was stretched tight and dry, patchy red. Sarah swallowed a quick taste of panic; the thought came from nowhere: *So soon?* She sent for Dr. Pratt.

The doctor examined Joe, teased him gently about his thinness, saying over his shoulder, "What's the matter, Miss Eamons? Don't you feed this boy more than once a week?"

Sarah tried to joke back, her voice wavering over the words. "Feed him? Dr. Pratt, Joseph has two hollow legs! If you saw him at table!"

Joe sat pliantly under the doctor's prodding hands, grinned a shy grin that was overshadowed by that beaky nose, and said nothing.

When the examination was done, they left Joe to dress; Sarah took the doctor out to the sun porch and sent for iced tea. Then she turned to him, and her eyes were dark-circled and afraid.

"Boy really could use a few extra pounds, Miss Sarah," Dr. Pratt began easily. "He hasn't complained of any pain? The skin around the — ah —affected parts seems irritated."

"I've seen him scratching at it," Sarah agreed. "But he hasn't said anything. Doctor, what's happening to him?"

Dr. Pratt paused uncomfortably, as if he were genuinely at a loss. "Miss Sarah, I can't tell you what I don't know. We don't know who his folks were, if this condition is congenital, anything like that, and I've never even heard of anything quite like your Joe's case. All I can say is to wait. He's sound, healthy — that is, except for ... well, you know as well as I do that the boy's not ... altogether normal. This may be part of the course of his, uh, his condition."

"All we can do is wait," Sarah repeated dully.

"It's the only answer I have right now," the doctor agreed unhappily. "You might put some lotion on the bumps to sooth the itch."

Carrie brought the iced tea, and Sarah and Dr. Pratt sat quiet, sipping. When the doctor rose and Sarah had paid him, she offered to have the hired man take him back to town in the buggy, but he refused, insisting the walk would do him good. By the time Joe had appeared, half a cookie in his hand and his smile lined with crumbs, Sarah had calmed down a little and could smile at him.

"It's all right, Mama, I'm fine," Joe told her, and patted her hand awkwardly.

Sarah kept herself from gripping his hand, clutching at him. "You're fine, but too skinny. Where do you keep all the cookies you eat?" she teased, but inside her the voice repeated, *So soon?*

After that, Sarah kept a jealous, distant watch on the boy, unwilling to encroach on his freedom but fear-

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ful, terrified of the change she knew in her bones was coming soon. Where the intuition came from she could not have said, and gradually, as time went by and nothing seemed to happen, she began to scoff at her fears, relaxed and let the tension ease from her. It would be a shame, she reasoned, to hem Joe round just to ease her own mind.

She was awakened from deep sleep one night by shrieks, Joe's screams, high and unnatural, like the coarse screech of a crow. Sarah was out of her bed in a minute, trailing her night wrapper around her as she ran. Outside his room, the two hired girls stood, hands fluttering near their mouths in mingled fear and curiosity. "Don't sound like nothing human," Bess was saying.

"I'm sure it's just a nightmare," Sarah said hurriedly. "Go on to bed. If I need you, I'll ring." She did not stop to argue.

Joe was tangled up in his bedclothes, whimpering and crying. His skin was fiery hot to touch, and dry; when she turned him over, Sarah saw that the bony ridges on his back were enlarged, breaking the skin in places. Sarah left Joe just long enough to send Bess for Dr. Pratt. Then she went back to Joe's room, bathed his forehead with cool water, and held him, trying to calm his cries.

The doctor was not much help. He looked at the boy, gave Sarah a powder to bring the fever down, and shook his head, angry at his own helplessness. "I don't know how to fight this. It must have something to do with his back, but I'm damned — excuse me, Miss Sarah. I don't know what to tell you except to wait and do the things we can do for a fever: give him the powder when he gets restless, a spoonful in water; a little broth if he'll take it, maybe some tea. I'll be back tomorrow. And send someone for me if he seems to get worse."

Sarah nodded dumbly and went back to Joe's bed.

The fever lasted through the night and into the next day, and the white house was filled with Joe's harsh cries. The hired girls and the cook and the hired man felt sorry for Miss Eamons and the boy, but kept as far from the room as they could. Joe began to mutter incoherently sometime that afternoon, the same garbled, incomprehensible sounds over and over. Sarah sat by him holding one bony hot hand in her own, changing the dampened cloths on his forehead, watching him and wishing she could reach him, talk the language of his fever to him. At nightfall he was still delirious, showing no sign of change for good or bad. Bess tapped at the door and persuaded Sarah to take a bite of supper, but she would not leave the boy. A tray was brought upstairs to her.

Toward midnight it seemed to Sar-

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ah that Joe was quieter, a little less restless; he cried out less frequently. In the silences she had time to realize how tired she was; her eyes were gravelly red and her head hurt with a dull, pounding ache. When it seemed that Joe was sleeping, really asleep, Sarah went down to the kitchen for a few minutes to make herself tea, a tisane for her headache. There was a certain comfort in measuring white willow bark, chamomile, and cloves into the pot, adding hot water and smelling the rich, calming odor that rose up from the warm teapot in her hands. She took the pot and a china cup with her on a tray.

Joe's door was open. Sarah frowned and cursed herself for carelessness, worrying about the draft. Then she saw: Joe was gone.

"Oh, God." She stood in the doorway, unable to move, the tea tray still her hands. "No, God, please." Upstairs? Downstairs? Somewhere along the hall? Then she heard the scratchy pad of bare feet on the polished boards of the hall floor and felt a draft. He was at the front door.

Sarah dropped the tea tray and ran for the stairs, took them two at a time. When her shawl caught on something, she pulled at it angrily and small table crashed down behind her; a vase broke. Sarah ran blindly down the stairs, out the door, calling Joe's name.

He was a pale blur in the moonlight, making his way across the smooth darkness of the lawn toward the north woods. As he walked he was talking, still in gibberish, and his hands flew up in gestures to an unseen listener.

Sarah followed after him. The smooth kid of her slippers skidded on the damp grass, and she kicked them off, running barefoot across the lawn, aware of the chill and the brass taste of fear in her mouth. She called to Joe over and over, but the words were jolted as she ran, lost in the darkness, unintelligible. He was almost in the woods; Sarah did not realize at first that he had stopped walking. His small pajamaed body was framed against the dim trees as he waited for her. When she reached him, Sarah was out of breath, unable for a moment to do more than gather him into her arms. For the first time in hours, his skin was cool to touch.

"Mama," his croaking voice broke the silence. "Mama, *look*."

Then Sarah looked into the edge of the woods and saw. First the eyes, a dull violet glitter in the dark. The same jolt that had gone through her years before when she first saw the baby in Dr. Pratt's spare bedroom went through her again. Sarah held her boy closer to her, rocking him slightly, crooning, "Baby, baby, it's all right. Joey, come back to the house. It's all right."

The boy squirmed in her arms, twisted around to face the waiting shadows. Sarah thought she saw more

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eyes, more indistinct figures deeper in the woods.

"They've come to get me," Joe said simply.

Her heart contracted. Sarah shut her eyes tightly for a moment. "Shhh, baby," she whispered, and stroked his long cheek. Like an answer, the creature in the shadows stepped forward into the moonlight and spoke to Joe in a grating stream of language.

"Mama, he's kin of mine. They're my people." Joe's voice was full of wonder, joy; the words said *at last* and *of course.* They cut Sarah to the heart.

She looked at the creature. Tall it was, taller than a man, with a slanting forehead and heavy brow that shadowed his glittering eyes. The creature's body was broad and muscular, his face long and narrow, his nose more like a beak; his ears were large and sharply pointed, twisting an inch or so above his head. Behind him there was a rustle of movement: wings, Sarah realized. Huge, powerful wings that sprang, she was certain, from bony ridges that ran parallel to his spine.

"What does it want?" She asked at last, althought she knew.

The creature broke into harsh speech again. Joe listened, seemed to understand.

His name is Hreu, Mama. He's come for me. It's time. Do you see?"

So soon, Sarah thought.

"They *are* my kin. I never belonged here, except to you, but I'm one of them." Joe raised one hand ruefully and gestured over his shoulder at the reddened, bony lumps on his own back. "They'll know how to take care of me, Mama," he added softly. He was still holding her hand tightly.

Sarah stared ahead of her at the creature, her mouth set like pale stone. "They will take care of you? Where were they when you were a baby? Where were your ***kin*** when you were left in the woods? Joey...." she tightened her grasp on his hand. "It's too soon. It's not time yet."

"It's time, Mama. It's how they do, leaving the babies to be found and raised up by others. When the change comes, they know, and they come to get them. It's my turn now."

Sarah dropped down to her knees, holding the boy and suddenly it was as if he were the adult and she the child: he spoke to her slowly, in a considered manner, with inexorable reason. "I love you. But this is so strong, I can't not go with them. I have to: Mama, they're *my* people." In those words Sarah heard echos of years of taunts and bruises.

Then Joe giggled, a high, giddy sound. "In another year I'll look like Hreu. You couldn't explain that in town, not wings!"

Briefly he looked like any ordinary little boy, his face lit with mischief. A profound sorrow washed over Sarah; it took her a moment to control her voice. "I won't ever see you again."

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Joe stopped giggling. He looked at Hreu, struggled with broken syllables and his own vehemence, then turned back to Sarah. "Come with us, Mama. Hreu says you can, if you want. There aren't many of us left, but enough. You could come." In the dark his eyes flickered back and forth, from Sarah in the moonlight to Hreu in the shadows. "*Please* come."

For a moment Sarah played with the possibility. Standing in the chilly night air with dew on her feet, she thought of her years of waiting for the flash of difference that would conquer her, the flash she had seen in Joe's eyes and in Hreu's. Joe was right. Hreu was right: she could not keep her boy with her any longer. At best he would become a prisoner in her house; at worst he might be killed by the people of Tannesburg. She thought yearningly of flight, of adventure, of Joe's voice lingering over the words "my people," making even Sarah an alien.

Very slowly, very deliberately, she said, "If you have to go, go with my blessings, Joseph." Her voice said *darling, baby, little one, sweetheart.* "I couldn't go with you; I'd only slow you down. You'll be learning so much, growing up." Sarah drew a shaking breath and looked over Joe's head into Hreu's violet eyes. Did they understand what they did to the people left behind? "I love you, baby."

He flung his arms around her neck, tight, and hung on for a long moment, his narrow cheek pressed against hers. "I love you, too, Mama. I won't forget you, I promise I won't...."

It was Sarah who pushed him away, gently. There were tears on his face when he turned to follow Hreu and disappear into the wilderness.

Sarah was discovered by the cook the next morning, huddled on the steps in the kitchen, the hem of her robe still damp, ruined with dirt and dew. She was so deeply asleep that the cook was afraid and sent for Dr. Pratt, seeing to it that Miss Eamons was wrapped in blankets and settled in a chair before the fire. When Sarah woke, surrounded by the ruddy concerned faces of the cook and the maids, she began to cry, huge gasping sobs that echoed hoarsely in the kitchen.

"Sweet Lord, the boy's died in the night." The cook sent Bess upstairs to see, and in a few minutes the girl was back, as pale as Sarah, to report that Joe was gone, his bedclothes all twisted up and the door wide open. Sarah wept, unhearing.

Dr. Pratt and the cook pieced together what must have happened, the boy's delirium and fevered escape, Miss Eamon's waking and fruitless pursuit. The doctor did what he could: left laudanum for her, and went home to tell his wife.

The forms were observed. Advertisements were placed in the papers,

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letters sent to the sheriffs of neighboring counties — but nothing more was heard of Joseph Eamons, and he was at last regarded as dead, gone as mysteriously as he had come twelve years before. Through the fall and winter, Miss Eamons did not mix with her neighbors, and it was said she took the boy's death far too hard, and he only an orphan and not even real kin. Still, people were kind to her and solicitous. Through her veil of grief, Sarah came to realize this and was distantly grateful.

When spring came, she began to go about more, started concerning herself with church work and the library committee. She was again the handsome Miss Eamons, crisp and deliberate in her lawn dresses and cashmere shawls, her civility careful but warm. Only once did she break the calm, when a well-meaning lady from the Women's Auxiliary suggested that Sarah might adopt another boy. Then her smile disappeared and there was only bleak anger when she spoke. "They are not like dolls, Mrs. French. You do not replace one with another."

No one mentioned the idea to her again.

In May, when it was warm enough to spend afternoons on the sun porch, Sarah took her knitting there and sat, looking out at the empty green of the lawn. One afternoon as she sat, Carrie appeared. A man had called and was asking to see her.

"What is his name, Carrie?"

"He says it's Mercier, ma'am." Carrie struggled with the pronunciation. "He's from clear up in French Canada. Should I show him in?"

Her curiosity piqued, Sarah nodded. Carrie returned with a tall man, dressed in a light summer wool suit. He was middle-aged, handsome in a quiet sort of way; his red-brown whiskers brushed the collar of his shirt when he smiled. About his eyes there was a look of tiredness, and something more than tiredness in their expression.

His voice was low, attractively accented. "Miss Eamons? Thank you for seeing me. I realize it may seem strange to you, a man you don't know — you will understand, I think. I read your advertisements."

It took Sarah a moment to remember. "Advertisements?" she repeated blankly.

"Yes, ma'am. And I have been in Tannesburg for a few days, asking questions. I hope you do not mind this, but I think you are the person who can help me. I had a daughter."

Something in the way he said it made Sarah really look at him for the first time. "I see," she said slowly. "Mr. Mercier, may I offer you some tea?"

He nodded gratefully, and Sarah rang for another cup. By common consent they spoke idly about the weather until Carrie returned with the teacup and hot water. When she was gone, Mr. Mercier began his ex-

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planation again. "Adele, my daughter, was an unusual little girl. We adopted her, my wife and I, when she was only a few weeks old. A foundling discovered near our village. When my wife died, Adele and I became even closer, all in all to each other, you would say. Then, about eighteen months ago, she was taken ill, dreadfully so. I *lost* her."

"You lost her," Sarah repeated deliberately, considering.

"I lost her." He agreed. "She was different from other children, Miss Eamons. Adele was—"

"Thin and bony with a funny voice and a nose too big for her face," Sarah said, conscious of a mounting excitement. "Am I right, Mr. Mercier?"

He smiled, not happily but as if he had found a resting-place after a very long journey. "You are right, Miss Eamons. When she left, I didn't let go easily. I tried to follow after her."

"Did you ever find—?"

"No. I'm sorry, Miss Eamons, I never did. But Adele told me before she left that there were others, other children like her, other people like me and you who raised children and loved them and lost them. I have been searching for someone like you since I knew she was lost to me."

They talked quietly for a long time.

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The sun set, and they sat in the lavender twilight, still talking, while Carrie rattled dishes noisily in the parlor, trying to remind Sarah that it was past the hour when a gentleman could sit unchaperoned with a maiden lady. Finally, Sarah asked Mr. Mercier if he would like to stay for dinner.

He smiled and glanced toward Carrie's officious silhouette in the parlor window. "Not tonight, I think. But I would like to come back again, if you will permit me to." He rose and gathered up his hat and stick.

"Tomorrow. Please," Sarah urged. For the first time in months, her smile was generous and touched her eyes. "We have a lot to talk about."

He took his leave, and Carrie saw him to the front door. From the sun porch Sarah could dimly see him on the path and then on the road, walking toward Tannesburg. When he was out of sight, Sarah sat down again, thinking of Joe without pain for the first time in months. Cuckoos, Mercier had called Joe's people, for the bird that left its young to be raised up in other nests. Cuckoos, that were a sign of spring.

It was warm enough, but Sarah did not sit outside long. Dinner would be ready shortly; Paul Mercier would be back in the morning.

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Bob Leman wrote "The Pilgrimage of Clifford M." (May 1984). If you have ever passed the time playing a game, you will want to carefully consider the following...

Instructions

BY
BOB LEMAN

This is the only notice you will receive.

You will follow the instructions set out below.

1.

Dress warmly and leave your house. Do not tell your family you are leaving. Do not talk to them at all. Do not listen if they talk to you. Dress warmly and leave your house.

2.

Proceed at a brisk clip to the center of town. Do not speak to anyone in the street. Do not — *do not* — become involved in any conversations. Step right along. Do not tarry.

3.

At the center of town, in the little park across from the courthouse, is a building that was not there the last time you were downtown. It will strike you as a very ugly building, and its appearance will make you feel apprehensive. Pay no attention to such feelings. Do not look right or left. Enter the building. It has only one doorway and no visible door. Go right in.

4.

You will find yourself standing in a cold gray mist, with no visibility whatever. This will cause you to feel great fear. Despite the fear, you will follow instructions. Advance six steps.

5.

A portion of your mind will remain free of the constraint that has been placed upon you, and that portion will be observing your actions with amazement, incredulity, and terror — since everything that you are doing is without your advertence, and is, as it were, puppetlike. If you survive the present undertaking, you will remember everything that has happened, but you will never be able to speak of it. You will never be able to talk about any-

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thing at all that took place after the instant you looked at the symbol at the top of the first of these sheets. The configurations of this symbol are such that it caused your mind to be wholly obedient to these instructions. You have no choice. You must do what you are instructed. Under no circumstances will you lose these sheets.

6.

From this point onward you will read only one instruction at a time. Do not read instructions number eight until you have accomplished what was instructed in number seven, and so on. Read each instruction completely before beginning to comply. Instructions from this point onward will carry from time to time comforting words of reassurance and explanation, as a means of preserving sanity in the portion of your mind that remains your own.

7.

After you have advanced six steps, stand quite still. You will immediately feel an unpleasant sensation. It will, in fact, be agonizing pain. Ignore it. It is felt by all carbon-based life-forms undergoing interdimensional translation. It will do you no permanent harm, except possibly in a minor way to your muscular coordination and control. If you find yourself thereafter to be subject to facial tics or spasmodic jerkings of one limb or another, pay no attention to them. You have much to do. Bend all your efforts toward obeying these instructions. Do not falter.

8.

You are now in Area One. This one will be easy. Look about you. What you see will frighten you greatly. You will not let that fact hinder you. It is just a landscape. It is only the fact that it is totally alein that frightens you. You have never seen or imagined anything remotely like it. Words of reassurance: 26,844 members of your race have been here before you. We know all about Area One. Follow instructions and you will quickly be in Area Two. Perform the following acts: take four slow — very slow — steps forward, and immediately sidestep quickly — very quickly — to your right.

9.

The large round hole that suddenly appeared where you were standing before you sidestepped has, literally, no bottom. It is characteristic of Area One that these holes appear. Close your eyes and begin to run as fast as you can straight ahead. By fast is meant *very fast*.

10.

You have been unconscious for some time, as a consequence of running full tilt into the wall that suddenly materialized. It is characteristic of Area One that walls materialize and dematerialize. If you had not spent an unconscious period, you would not now be reading this instruction. You would have been disassembled by the indigenous energy foci. They did not sense your presence because you were unconscious. It may be that this neces-

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sary collision has damaged you to some extent. Since you are reading this, the damage was not incapacitating. The wall is no longer there. Walk forward, or crawl if you must. Pass through the discontinuity portal just ahead. You will perceive it as a shimmer in the atmosphere. The faster you pass through, the less painful it will be.

11.

You are now in Area Two. There is no need for great haste in moving on to Area Three. You may lie down and rest for several minutes. Perhaps the pain you are almost certainly undergoing will abate somewhat. Area Two is, for your race, the safest of the areas through which you must pass in completing your task. There is at this stage time for you to absorb certain knowledge that will no doubt ease the concerns that trouble the portion of your mind that continues to keep your identity. If that core of ego were to become hopelessly insane, it would affect your comprehension of these instructions, and you would be of no further use to us.

We are observing you as you proceed with your task, but we may not communicate with you except through these instructions. Our observations will enable us to amend the instructions for the one who follows you, just as you have benefited from those who preceded you. Eight hundred sixty-one members of your race have been in Area Two before you. Each was like you, a random Homo sapiens sufficiently literate to read the instructions. We have great hope that one of your race will be the individual to attain the end we desire. We have only recently discovered your race. We find you to be docile and moderately intelligent, and physically better suited for this task than many other races. You may have other useful qualities as well that we have not yet discovered. Some life-forms have proven to be quite useless to us. We tested them thoroughly before turning to others. Between our last previous discovery of a useful race and our finding of you, we tested 773 intelligent life-forms. Twelve hundred forty-four individuals of each of these life-forms were given these instructions. Every single one perished in Area One. But you are already in Area Two, comparatively undamaged, and ready at this point to proceed, having had your state of mind improved by learning these facts.

If you are of the egg-producing sex, you will now discover that you have sprouted a thick and vile-smelling fur over large portions of your skin. If you are of the fertilizing sex, you will find yourself to have scales instead of skin. If you are not yet large enough to produce eggs or sperm, you will grow, from various parts of your surface, horny lumps oozing a sticky fluid. These things happen to your race in Area Two. They will not affect your capacity to carry out your instructions. In each of the areas, as you proceed, phenomena will occur that are

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undreamed of, and indeed impossible, in your original continuum. As you proceed from area to area, you are in movement outside space and contrary to time as you perceive it; the bases of reality will differ from area to area, and your senses will react to this shifting in often unpredictable — and, to you — always frightening ways. Pay no attention. Follow your instructions as long as you are physically able to do so.

You will by now have observed that as far as you can see in every direction the flat plain is studded with protrusions about as high as the middle joint of your walking limbs (if you are full-grown) and about as thick as your forelimbs. Each of these is topped by a spinning disk. They may be alive, but perhaps not. It does not matter. You will note that some of the disks are of one color and some of another. We cannot give you a name for the colors because our observations of your race have failed to associate the proper words with your sensory perceptions. Walk — or otherwise proceed as best you are able — among these protrusions. Find a group of the same color surrounding one of the other color. Go among them and place your hand on the disk of the center protrusion.

12.

You have now been transported through another portal, and you are in Area Three. Three hundred thirty-seven of your race have been here before you. You are becoming inured to these transitions. The pain may have been less this time. We will now tell you that we lied in Instruction 11. There was in fact danger in Area Two. Because we were unable to specify colors, the chance of you selecting the wrong color was equal to that of selecting the right color. If you had selected wrongly, the consequences would have been unfortunate — but we will not enumerate them, in the interest of preserving your serenity.

Area Three is in a universe with the same physical laws as your own; it possesses galaxies of stars, and some of these stars have planets, just as your own star does. This planet is much like your home planet. It abounds in savage life-forms, most of which eat each other. We tell you this in order that you may be alert and wary. You cannot prevail in combat with these creatures. Flee when you see one. Hide, if you can find a place.

You are standing on the bank of a small stream. You may drink from it if you require water. Keep a sharp lookout. You have a very good chance of surviving if you can hide yourself in time. Here and there you will see holes that have what appear to be tangles of roots at their bottoms. When you encounter a predator, leap into one of these holes, if there is one nearby and you have time. These holes are in fact the mouths of creatures that live underground with only their mouths exposed, and live upon whatever edible things may fall into their mouths. You

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are inedible to them. After a short period the creature will spit you out. By then the predator may be gone, and you can proceed. Every creature that you see will be a predator. There is no place to hide but in these mouths.

Walk upstream along the brooklet. Some of the plants are predatory. Try to avoid them. Some of them will bind you with vines and suck your blood; others will paralyze you with a sting, and engulf you for slow digestion. They are, however, by your standards, lethargic and slow moving. Watch for them and dodge out of their way. If you are not badly damaged, you can move much faster than they can. Walk upstream along the brooklet. Walk for a distance equal to about four hundred or five hundred times your body length. If you are small, or only partially grown, it may be between five hundred and six hundred times your body length.

Walk upstream along the brooklet, evading predators of every kind, until you come to a structure. This structure resembles a great mound of the nasal mucous of your race. It is about fifty times your height. It apparently has a disgusting smell. It is the nest of one of the indigenes, a creature in some ways resembling the giant reptiles once common on your world, but in other ways resembling some of your insects. It excretes the stuff of which its nest is built. Despite the semiliquid appearance of this nest, it is quite hard. The excretion hardens upon exposure to the atmosphere. Halfway up its side is an opening. Climb up, if you can, and enter. The portal you must pass through is deep inside, and will be reached by simply following the passage. The portal was of course there before the creature built its nest, and indeed has always been there. It was pure chance that led the creature to build its nest at this particular spot. The creature is unaware that the portal is there. None of these portals can be detected by life-forms native to the area of the portal's location unless such life-forms are directed to the portals, as you were when you began this task.

Inside the nest you will find it difficult to breathe. It will not, however, be impossible. The atmosphere will be harmful to your lungs. You must proceed as rapidly as possible, in order to reach the portal before your lungs cease to function. Hanging from the ceiling of the passage will be objects that will appear to you to be thick, oily ropes swinging about. Exercise care not to be touched by them. If you are, you will be dissolved. Hurry along. If you survive, it will be impossible to miss the portal. Get through it quickly.

13.

You are in Area Four. Do not move. Do not move at all until you have read this instruction.

You are the eighteenth of your kind to reach this area. No other life-form has supplied more than five individuals who have reached it. However, your race has greater difficulties with Area

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Four than do the others. We cannot tell why.

As soon as you move, your shape will change. It may change to a shape that lacks the capacity for movement. If that should happen, you will of course have to remain here permanently. If, however, your new shape is capable of movement, simply go straight forward, advancing by whatever means of locomotion you can contrive under the difficulties presented by the form you have acquired. Because of the geometry of this place constantly undergoes random variation, it is impossible to tell the distance to the portal at any given moment. Simply move forward until you reach it. If the portal is at this time a very great distance off, you may not reach it, as there is no way for you to obtain nourishment here, and, in any case, you may be unable to ingest nourishment in your present form.

Now you may move.

14.

You have passed through the portal and you are in Area Five. You have returned to your original shape, or something very close to it. The other member of your race who reached this point recovered its original shape in almost every particular, with perhaps some slight alteration of the proportions between the various parts of its body. It retained to a considerable degree the power of forward movement and an intermittent capacity for coarse manipulation of objects. No doubt you find yourself as well off, and perhaps better.

In this area the portal is close at hand. You could see it from where you now are, if it were not hidden behind that large machine. We do not know how this machine appears to you, because your perceptions do not extend to all the planes in which it has its existence. The part that falls within the range of your senses apparently is perceived by your race as a terrifying large live thing. That at any rate is our conclusion based upon the behavior of your predecessor.

The function of this machine, to describe it in an analogy that you will understand, is to take samples and analyze them. There is no way of knowing what sort of samples it was designed to analyze, except that they were evidently large — probably about the size of your head. The entities who created this machine finished their history and disappeared very long ago, at a time when your native sun was still taking form. The machine continues to operate, but perhaps no longer exactly as it was intended to. In any case, it will not permit you access to the portal until it has taken its sample.

You will have noted that these instructions are now more elaborate and explanatory than they were initially. This has been because it appears from our admittedly incomplete knowledge of the psychology of your race that you may function better if you have some comprehension of what you are

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doing. In the early stages it did not matter, but now you have advanced very far. While of course you have no choice but to obey the instructions, it may be that these explanations will inspire you to an added effort, or even enthusiasm.

If you are able to [redacted] machine, you will see the portal plainly, and you will go through it.

Now advance and let the machine take its samples.

15.

You are in Area Six. You are the first being to achieve it. Heretofore the samples taken by the machine have always been vital parts of the life-form furnishing the sample, or even the entire being. Clearly, there remains enough of you to continue to live, and to have made your way from the machine to the portal. You are a durable being, for one of your subdivision.

Area Six is the final area. There are no difficulties in this area. It is a harmless, peaceful, and — perhaps, to you — a beautiful place. Or perhaps not. We know little of your aesthetics. There are many large plants here, much resembling the trees of your native world. A small road or path winds among them. Follow the path. Along the way are streams of water from which you may drink; there are also fruits and nuts that are safe to eat for life-forms of your subdivision.

Advancing along the path from the opposite direction is another life-form. It will resemble nothing you have seen or imagined, but it is, like you, carbon-based, and, like you, has been following a set of instructions, which were much more difficult than yours. When you confront this being, reach out with any part of you that remains capable of reaching [redacted] touch it. It is instructed to [redacted] same to you.

The instructions following this one will be the final instructions. You may read it after you have physically touched the other creature.

Proceed.

16.

The fact that you are reading this means that you have completed the undertaking.

Your race is one of those with the characteristic of curiosity, and you will want to know our reasons for requiring you to make this journey. We will tell you.

You have on your native planet an intellectual diversion quite suitable for your minds, called *chess*. We are now playing, with another entity much like ourself, a game with distant analogies to the game of chess raised several powers in complexity. Nothing about this game would be in any way comprehensible to you, of course, and we will make no attempt to explain it. Instead, we will continue the chess analogy and tell you that while there have already been hundreds of millions of moves in this game, it remains very far from over. Millions of our chessman are in motion upon a board that encompasses all of the past time and

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any point in or portion of any of the universe that may become useful. You and the being you have just encountered comprise jointly a minute part of one of our chess pieces. The passage through the portals on the part of each of you, and your final coming together, form part of a tiny link in a predicted chain of cause and effect that will, in a very distant future time, lead to a curious mutation in a race whose first ancestor has not yet come into being.

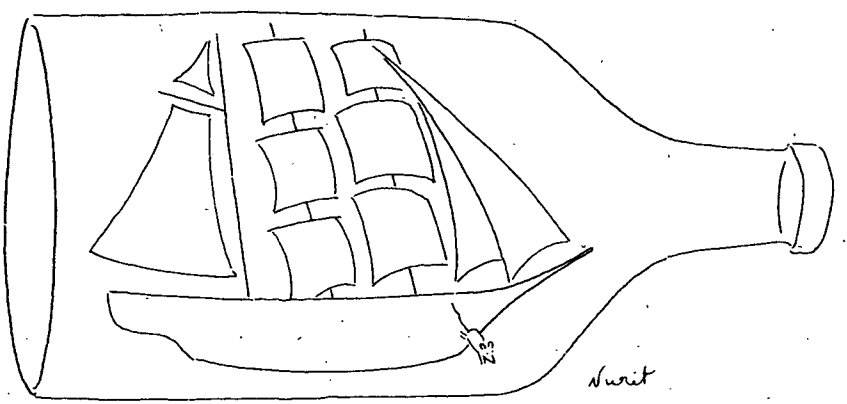
Unless, of course, the move by our opponent that follows this one nullifies ours. We will, in that event, make an appropriate response. You will understand that all the pieces are being moved all the time. The analogy with chess is in fact quite loose.

At some point — it will be at a time that would seem to you to be unthinkably remote — the game will be over. The loser will congratulate the winner. We and it will then invent and agree upon the rules of a new game, and it will commence.

That is what we do. You, with your curiosity, may ask: Why?

The answer is: To pass the time, to alleviate boredom.

Your curiosity is now satisfied, and we are finished with you. You are now free from the restraints imposed by these instructions, and may do as you like. If you wish to try to return to your starting place, you will find all the portals exactly where they were when you were coming here. They are open both ways. The difficulties in each area remain unchanged, but you are quite durable. You might be back.



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Installment 2: *In Which Sublime and Ridiculous Pass Like Ships In the Night*

Twenty years ago — it seems like just yesterday it burns for me with such clarity — during the 1964-65 television season, I learned a startling truth about working in the visual mediums of film and video. I was writing for a series you'll all recall titled *The Outer Limits,* and it was the most salutary experience I've ever had as a scenarist. It was the second year for that anthology of sf/fantasy stories; and because ABC-TV had decided they were going to cancel the show; and because it was more fiscally responsible for them to let it go one more season than to lay out large amounts to replace it with something new; and because everyone involved, from production companies to the network itself, was skimming off the top: the budgets were tiny even for those frontier days of black-and-white. So in a very real way, no one was watching what we did. And we were able to write what we wanted to write, because no one really gave a damn.

As long as we stayed within budget.

So that meant what we had available by way of special effects and expensive location shooting was minimal, and we had to substitute imagination.

The plots were more complex than what is usually doled out on network series, and we used misdirection, like "limbo" sets and suspense in place of Anderson opticals. We leaned heavily on characterization and inventiveness. The shows that came out of that wonderful season continue to be re-run in syndication. Not a year goes by that I don't receive tiny residual checks for my

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Outer Limits segments that continue to draw a viewership here and overseas. In England, several years ago, they were a primetime rage.

The startling truth that has become clear to me since I wrote those shows, having afterward worked on multi-million dollar productions, is that vast sums of money budgeted for science fiction films and television specials is more likely to produce an impediment to serious filmmaking than it is to grease the way to the production of films that we remember with pleasure. I'm sure there are exceptions to this rule — *Alien* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *E.T.* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* come immediately to mind — but they are glaring exceptions that seem, to me, only to buttress the rule.

This startling truth intrudes on my perceptions as I view, this month, five films that range from minuscule budgets (by today's acromegalic standards) to bottom lines that would, in times past, have sent dozens of Titanics down the nautical ways.

If *Arthur* (1981) gladdened your heart, and if you squirmed with pleasure in the warmth of that feeling, then I do not think you will regret my recommending SPLASH (Touchstone Films). By the time this review sees print, you may have to hunt beyond the first-run theaters for this marvelous minnow; but if you passed it by on the grounds that the basic premise seemed silly, you'll find a reconsideration and the search eminently worthwhile. Because it is fitting and proper that *Splash* was one of the biggest moneymakers of the summer filmgoing season. It is a dear movie in the sense of that adjective as fondly-considered, honorable, heartfelt and scarce. Scarce, as in reasonably-priced.

It only cost eight million dollars (as opposed to $46 million for the unloveable *Greystoke* reviewed here last month); it was directed by a thirty-year-old actor best known for his tv sitcom role as straight-man to The Fonz, whose most outstanding previous directorial outing was the flawed *Night Shift* (1982) (as opposed to *Greystoke*'s Oscar-winning Hugh Hudson); its leading man comes to the big screen directly from one of the more embarrassing tv series in recent memory (as opposed to *Greystoke*'s internationally-lauded cast); its special effects are so few and so subtle as to seem nonexistent (as opposed to *Greystoke*'s $7 million-plus for Rick Baker's ape makeup alone); and it was distributed — and some say partially financed sub-rosa — as an independent production by Disney's Buena Vista (whose track record for fantasy is notable for *The Black Hole* [1979] and *Tron* [1982]); not to mention a basic plot premise so trivial it might have been rejected for one of the tripartite segments of "Fantasy Island" (as opposed to the

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alleged canonical presentation of Burroughs's classic novel).

Yet despite all those seeming drawbacks and question marks, *Splash* comes out of nowhere, with a minimum of screamhorn ballyhoo, to endear to us its director, Ron Howard, its leading man, Tom Hanks, its lovely female lead, Daryl Hannah, and the fledgling Touchstone Films, as a gentle, uplifting fantasy that puts most other gargantuan projects in the genre to shame. Most particularly *Greystoke.*

Splash is a love story, the romance between a likeable, average guy who runs a wholesale fruit and vegetable business in New York ... and a, uh, er, a mermaid. Now hold it! Don't go running the other way. If you need pith and moment, you can salve your lust for cheap entertainment with a perfectly acceptable rationalization that it's a cunning contemporary reworking of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth. Which it is, truly. Trust me on this one.

There is no need to explicate the storyline further. It is more than strong enough to support the charming, faultless performances of Hanks, Hannah, Howard Morris and those two inspired escapees from SCTV, John Candy and Eugene Levy. (Candy, in fact, seems to me to be the worthy inheritor of Belushi's mantle, with a style and charisma that the late comedian never fully developed, for all the mythic revisionism attendant on his death.) Nor need more be said about the plot's twisty turns than to add that it provides a showcase for Ron Howard's abilities as a director: a talent as sure and as correctly self-effacing as that of Sturges or Capra. With this film the lisping Winthrop of *The Music Man* (1962), the freckled Opie of "The Andy Griffith Show," the straight arrow Steve Bolander of *American Graffiti* (1973) and the incurably naive Richie Cunningham of "Happy Days" outperforms older and more extolled directors whose finest moments are not the blush on a butterfly's wings to what Howard has done here so; well, endearingly.

One final word before I send you off to see *Splash*, a word about internal logic and the use of restrained, intelligent special effects.

A traditional mark of bad sf films has been the need to "explain" specious reasoning of plots and SFX. Long-winded oratorios that throw around gobbledygook that confuses photons with protons, parsecs with light-years, oxides with oxhides. It is an indication that the makers of the film are ignorant, have perhaps read but not understood an Asimov essay, and hold the audience's intellect in contempt. Too much is said, too much is roundaboutly rationalized, too many flashing lights dominate the screen.

In *Splash* — take note all you parvenu filmmakers — we willingly suspend our disbelief that such a thing as a mermaid can exist, that such a

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creature could have a tail in the ocean and legs on land (as we never did in *Miranda* [1947] or *Mister Peabody and the Mermaid* [1948] no matter how beguiling Glynis Johns and Ann Blyth were as the sea-nymphs) because the scenarists and the production crew believe it! When you see *Splash* take note of the one brief conversation Eugene Levy has with Howie Morris, in which the rationale is established. It is, they say, because it *is*. Nothing further is needed. But it suffices because in the one special effect scene I can recall, gorgeous Daryl Hannah lies in the bathtub, runs her hand down her thigh ... and it begins to pucker as with scales. *C'est ça.*

Both the most and the least a responsible film critic can say is that the third *Star Trek* movie is out, and Trek fans will love it. Like a high mass in Latin or the asking of the four questions at a Passover seder, films continuing the television adventures of the familiar crew of the starship *Enterprise* are formalized ritual. Without all that has gone before — the original NBC series (1966-69), a Saturday morning animated version (1973-75), endless novelizations, a cult following that has spawned its own mini-fandom replete with gossipzines, newszines and even a flourishing underground of soft-core Kirk-*shtups*-Spock pornzines — these films would be non-events. (Though I am told that results of a studio-fostered research sample gathered from an audience last March 17th imparted the confusing statistic that 44% of those queried were "unfamiliar with *Star Trek*." I cannot explain this intelligence.)

But it is all True Writ now, and these movies need not be judged as if they were Film, or Story, or even Art. What it is, bro, is a growth industry.

STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK (Paramount) seems less interesting than *ST II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982) but infinitely better than the first feature-length adventure of them as boldly went where no man had gone before, *Star Trek — The Motion Picture* (1979). I'm not sure that's saying much, except to point out that producer-writer Harve Bennett has had the sense to keep creator Gene Roddenberry in a figurehead mode, thus permitting a savvy commercial recycling of time-tested and much-beloved tropes; and by allowing Leonard Nimoy to direct this film, Bennett has kept Spock in the fold: a canny solution by a minister without portfolio of the thorny problem posed by an indispensable star who wanted out.

And with but minor flaws easily credited to, and excused by, this being Nimoy's first major stint behind the camera, he has done a commendable yeoman job. There is, for instance, a pleasing easiness in the performances by the "regulars"; a result (I am told by several of the actors) of

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Nimoy's sensitivity in directing them as *actors* and not, as in past films directed by Wise and Meyer, as mere button-pushing background, as foils for the "stars" and the SFX whizbang.

There are a few interesting new moments this time: Christopher Lloyd's Klingon villain (strongest in the earlier stages of his appearance onscreen, before he converts from the guttural alien tongue to English); a 6-track Dolby stereo sound system designed to blast you out of the Cineplex box whereat you'll be screening the film; a nice sense of alien landscape on the Genesis Planet, especially the scenes of snow falling on giant cactus; the Klingon "Bird of Prey" battle cruiser.

Contrariwise, there are the usual problems: no one, not even Nimoy-as-Director, seems able to tone down William Shatner's need to mouth embarrassing and spuriously portentous platitudes as if he were readying himself to play the title role in the life story of Charlton Heston; the fine cast of "regulars" is once again denied extended scenes in which their talents can be displayed, in lieu of Shatner's scene-hogging and the expected flaunting of expensive special effects; Robin Curtis, replacing Kirstie Alley as the Vulcan Lt. Saavik, is as memorable as spaetzle; and the plot makes virtually no sense if examined closely.

But neither the positives nor the negatives of such effete critiques matter as much as a dollop of owl sweat. *Star Trek* has become, obviously, a biennial booster shot for Trekkies, Trekkers, Trekists, and fellow-trekelers. And as such, places itself as far beyond relevant analysis as, say, James Bond or Muppets movies.

The most and the least a responsible film critic can say is that the third *Star Trek* movie is out, and Trek fans will love it. For the rest of us, it's better than a poke in the eye with a flaming stick.

THE ICE PIRATES (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) is *so* ludicrous it ought to be enshrined in the Academy of Dumb Stuff with such other sterling freaks of nature as the lima bean, poison ivy, the Edsel and the singing of Billy Idol. A space opera that melds (and this is how they're selling it) *Star Wars* (1977) with *Captain Blood* (1935), this poor gooney bird of a movie has all the grace and charm of a heavy object falling downstairs.

If you accept the basic premise that the story takes place in a distant galaxy where the rarest, most valuable commodity is water, and that buccaneer swashbucklers make raids on the incredibly evil Templar Empire to hijack ice cubes from their interstellar refrigerator tankers, then I have some dandy land in the Sargasso Sea for sale that I think you'd like a lot. Furnished.

The acting, keynoted by performances by Robert Urich (late of the

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tv series "Vega$") and Mary Crosby (who tried to kill J.R. Ewing on "Dallas"), makes one look back with fondness on the thespic abilities of Jon Hall and Vera Hruba Ralston, Audie Murphy and Jack Webb.

This is the sort of thalidomide offspring of "Battlestar Ponderosa" that ought to be led out of the theater wearing a Hartz Flea Collar.

And yet, may Allah forgive me, there is a devil-may-care quality to this moronic sport that lingers with affection in the memory. There are moments — as when one robot kicks another in the nuts — that plumb such Olympian depths of stupidity that one must credit co-author/director Stewart Raffill with a degree of *chutzpah* unknown since Hitler opined he could conquer Russia in the wintertime.

I cannot in conscience recommend this film, but if you're the sort of entertainment-seeker who ain't embarrassed when the pregnant lady comes out of the audience to do a full striptease on amateur night at The Pink Pussycat, this may be just the grotesquerie for you. If so, don't write to thank me for the tip.

It's not nice, I know, to tempt you with a review of a wonderful film you may never be able to see, but having been privileged to attend a screening of THE QUEST (Okada International), a short film produced and directed by Saul and Elaine Bass, written by Ray Bradbury and based on his 1946 *Planet Stories* allegory, "Frost and Fire," I must risk your censure in hopes that some convention committee will bust its buns laying on a showing of this remarkable fantasy.

The film (as was so with the novella) operates off a lovely, simple idea: a race of humanoid creatures has a life-span of merely eight days. They are born, live and die in the place where they have always dwelled, but a hunger burns in them to know what lies "beyond," out there. Yet by the time an emissary to out-there grows old enough to be trained for the journey, s/he is doomed to death before s/he can reach the goal. The film is the journey finally made by one of these people, set on the path as a child.

Saul Bass, whom cinéastes correctly hold in awe for his innovative maintitles on *The Man With the Golden Arm* (1955), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), *Anatomy of a Murder* (1960), *North By Northwest* (1960), *Psycho* (1961), *Exodus* (1962), *Walk On the Wild Side* (1963), and forty other major films, who directed the shower sequence in *Psycho* and the final battle sequence in *Spartacus* (1961), and whose short films include the unforgettable *Why Man Creates* (1968), has done with live action and animation what studios spending millions have not been able to do: he has conveyed the ephemeral magic of Brad-

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bury's world-view without awkwardness in translation, without stilted dialogue or precious pomposity.

In less than half an hour of the most incredibly affecting visuals since the exundation of computer-generated graphics attendant on *Star Wars* and its horde of imitations, Bass and Bradbury have brought forth a small miracle of cinematic wisdom and beauty. I cannot recommend it too highly.

At present no plans are on line for commercial distribution, but schools, libraries, colleges *and accredited convention committees* can obtain *The Quest* in 16mm or videotape either through Pyramid Films, in Santa Monica, California, or by direct arrangement with Saul Bass/Herb Yager and Associates in Los Angeles. Acquisition is hardly difficult if desire exists.

It is my hope that I've whetted the appetites of those who program films for sf conventions. Before the next imprudent and morally reprehensible scheduling of such *dreck* as John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) or one of those detestable *Friday the 13th/Halloween* pukers, let those who pretend to some affection for film, who announce their respect for convention attendees, locate the *The Quest* and showcase it. In their lemming-like rush to saturate film programs with dross, scheduling officials would be ennobled by a sober shake of the head and the presentation of an important little film that is *about something more meaningful* than mass slaughter by devious means.

Of the many low blows leveled against Scott Joplin, the great ragtime composer, by a universe that seemed determined to keep him unknown in his lifetime, one of the most unfair was his scandalous treatment by the organizers of the famous "Lousiana Purchase Exposition," the St. Louis Expo of 1904.

Joplin was by far the most popular musician of his day, the nabobs who styled themselves arbiters of taste in those post-Victorian times of Late George Apley anal retention considered his work the merest popular trash, fit only for nautch houses and performances on streetcorners.

After a long and bitter struggle, Joplin's publisher managed to get the Exposition to invite Joplin to perform as one of a number of "American artists." It was a grudging invitation, and they set up the great black innovator in one miserable booth ... next door to John Philip Sousa's augmented march band.

Joplin and his exquisite little rags were, perforce, blown away by the brassy riptide of Sousa's martial maelstrom. In the cacophony of "Under the Double Eagle" no one paid pennyfarthing attention to the wonder of "The Cascades."

Preceding as paradigm.

I opened this column with the observation that too often a large budget gets in the way of a good film being

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made — as witness *Greystoke* at $46 million — while a reasonable financial outlay (for these inflated days) forces the producers to use imagination instead of flash&filagree — as witness *Splash* at $8 million. Concomitant to this theory is the demonstrated truth that films on which so much lucre has been expended get a sales campaign that blasts out of the public consciousness those possibly better films whose budgets don't include a 24-hour-a-day television blitz.

The horrible reality of that low blow trembles in my thoughts as I come to the film I've saved for last: what may be one of the most memorable sf films ever made, a textbook example of *how to* make a motion picture in this genre skillfully, inexpensively, and imaginatively, but a film that may, like the delicate tracery of Scott Joplin's work, be outblasted by the brassy special effects monstrosities being pushed so hard by studios with megabucks invested in inferior product.

I speak of ICEMAN (Universal). And I say it is magnificent.

I suggest that *Iceman* may well be one of those classic films utilizing the furniture of sf to illuminate the human condition that both aficionados and mundanes will overlook, or not even consider sf, as happened to two of the finest movies ever made in our realm: *Seconds* (1966) and *Charly* (1968). Overlooked entirely or, at best, quickly forgotten in the Doppler effect created by the passage of Jedis, Greystokes, firestarters and other assorted treks.

The story: a mining and exploration company, drilling in the Arctic above the 66th parallel, excises a block of ice in which a living Neanderthal has been frozen for 40,000 years. He is revived, he is sequestered in an immense terrarium for study, and communication is established with him.

It is not a new idea. (Richard Ben Sapir does it with greater panache and innovation in his outstanding 1978 novel, *The Far Arena,* which I commend to your attention.) But within the scope of this uncomplicated plot-line, such riches of drama, humanism, compassion and philosophical depth have been thrown up onto the screen that *Iceman* becomes no less than a shining icon of cinematic High Art.

The Australian director of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) and *Barbarosa* (1982), Fred Schepisi, has been imported by producer Norman Jewison; and he brings to this film the undeniable brio that seems to mark the work of this entire generation of Aussie directors — Peter Weir, George Miller, Bruce Beresford, Gillian Armstrong — a passion and intelligence against which we in America dare to throw the likes of De Palma, Landis, Ashby, Colin Higgins or Mark Lester. Based on a story by John Drimmer, the screenplay by Chip Proser and Drimmer is a model of

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clarity and foreshadowing. Engaging performances by Timothy Hutton as the anthropologist who becomes the prehistoric man's teacher and companion, and Lindsay Crouse as the project director, buttress and resonate to the absolutely astonishing acting done by the classically-trained (at the Chin Chiu Academy of the Peking Opera) Eurasian John Lone as "Charlie," the man frozen in time.

It is beyond words to attempt a characterization of the effulgence Lone brings to what might have been no better than a reprise of Victor Mature vaudeville grunting. There is a world of pathos and nobility in Lone's iceman, and if there is a God, Lone will be onstage at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion next year at Oscar time.

But more than superb acting and intelligent story, *Iceman* reaches toward questions that burn fiercely at the core of the human equation.

And in the final moments, when it seems that an insoluble situation has been constructed from which no satisfying egress exists, the scenarists, director and actors give us a finale that lifts our arms to the skies, that raises our eyes to the heavens, in precisely the bodily position the iceman was first found. As one who despises counterfeit emotion a la *Love Story* (1970), who does not cheer for the Rockys of this world, who winces at the cheap manipulation of much contemporary cinema, I found it difficult to admit that I was sitting with tears at the final freeze-frame of *Iceman*.

This is what filmmaking is all about.

It was made for less than ten million dollars.

If you see it, you will never forget it.

— *HARLAN ELLISON*

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From Ms. Hughes: "I started writing full time about two years ago after finishing my Ph.D. at Edinburgh University. As is obvious from the story, I'm a singer. The story came from two sources: a bout of severe laryngitis which left me unable to sing for six weeks, and an extrapolation of the infuriating phenomenon of getting a tune 'stuck' in your head."

You Shall Have A Song and Gladness of Heart

BY
KIM HUGHES

Hilary sketched the piano accompaniment absently, frowning.

"Try it again, Richard. Take it from 'I will divide the spoil.' " She took a swallow of her coffee. "Try to think about what you're singing. And get the words out clearly; you're running them together."

He stared sullenly at the music and she sighed mentally. Why did her students think they could get it right without working at it?

Richard sang, spitting out consonants angrily. She stifled irritation; how childish of him. And all these lessons ate into her practice time; how much longer before the drudgery began to affect her own singing?

She stopped playing. "Look, Richard, you won't even make the chorus if you just drone through the words without expression. *Think* about what you're singing: 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, and my hand shall destroy them!' Here's this tremendous text, and you make it sound like a madrigal about love in springtime!"

He glared at her. "I'm singing the best I can. I can't make my voice stronger just to please you."

"Of course not, I didn't ask you to. But forget about singing well for the moment, think about communicating. You're presenting the audience with music, not with Richard Holden, tenor supreme." Or was he? Maybe that was the problem.

She played the introduction as he slapped the pages back to the beginning. She grinned down at the keys. "All right, so you'd like to strangle me. Now take that feeling and put it in the music."

He drew a deep breath — to sup-

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press rage or to sing, she couldn't tell. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake...."

The short aria finished. "Better," she said, taking another sip of coffee. "But you're forgetting the enunciation again. It's no use getting the feeling across if the words get lost."

"Jesus Christ!" He slammed the heavy score onto the piano so that her coffee mug jumped. "Is anything ever good enough for you? You're a prima donna that you can tell everyone else how to sing?"

She shrugged, hiding her startled jump. "That's what you pay me for. Or do you want me to flatter you?" His bruised ego reacted violently.

"You don't care how I sing, whether I get the part or not," he accused.

This surprised him? "If you don't like the heat...."

"All right, we'll see." He grabbed his score, snatched his jacket from the sofa. "We'll just see at the audition." The door slammed behind him.

She sighed, pulling the lid over the keys. Stupid to offend a source of income like that, especially with rent day coming up. Those male-model good looks: she should have guessed. But who would expect a medical physicist to be so vain? Singers, yes; scientists, no. Or was it just amateurs who couldn't take professional criticism?

At least she could change out of her good skirt and tight shoes. Motormouth had made a cat-nest in her jeans and flannel shirt on the bedroom chair: she pitched him off.

"Sorry, my need is greater than yours. Go find Butch and cuddle with her."

Dropping her bra and blouse on the bed, she shrugged gratefully into the soft flannel and pulled the jeans over her lean hips. Hypocritical, really, wearing a bra just to look respectable for students, but then she didn't make the rules. She just had to play by them.

Hilary twisted her handkerchief into a tight spiral, then flicked it open and wiped her palms for the third time. God, she hated auditions.

Onstage the alto was nearing the end of her aria. Her voice was heavy for oratorio, but she made the most of the text. "Blotches and blains, blotches and blains broke forth on man and beast...." Too bad Richard couldn't hear how she handled those alliterative consonants, but they weren't auditioning tenors till the afternoon.

Hilary drew a deep breath and expelled it slowly, with control. Good: nerves hadn't affected her breathing, at least not yet. And there were two soprano parts in "Israel in Eygypt." That increased her chances.

It was dark and safe in the wings, with room for a whole chorus to hide unseen. In a moment she would have to step out on the bare stage, alone, blinded by the glare of the work lights. She fluffed her short dark curls and

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folded her handerkerchief, pushing it inside her blouse. She picked up her score and put it down again.

"Next, please," came the muffled shout from the front row. She made herself pause and straighten, her chin slightly raised. Picking up her score, she walked calmly to center stage.

"Name?"

"Hilary Blacking, soprano."

"And which aria?"

" 'Thou didst blow with the wind.' "

There was an age-long rustle of turning pages before the accompanist began the introduction. He took it briskly, faster than Hilary had rehearsed it, and she almost missed her entrance. Still, the first phrase flowed smoothly, arcing up into the theater's vaulted ceiling. The acoustics were excellent, a boost for her confidence.

An abrupt blare of music interrupted her, a P.A. system blasting out syrupy Muzak.

Before she could protest, it faded. The accompanist was still playing.

"Take it from the beginning again, Miss Blacking," said the voice, bored.

Easy for him to say! His concentration wasn't shattered. If she got hold of the clown messing around with the P.A.—

Her entrance came again. She got as far as " 'Thou didst blow—' " before Muzak blared again, drowning her out.

She stopped, and the Muzak faded. What the *hell* was happening?

"Thank you, Miss Blacking. That will be all."

"But, that music — I haven't had a chance to sing!"

"On the contrary, you've had two chances. I suggest you gain a little more experience before you audition for us again. Next, please!"

This was outrageous! Was there some sort of insane conspiracy? Were they in collusion against her? "But you *can't* rule me out just because somebody's messing around with the P.A. system!"

There was a pause. "This is a concert theater, young lady," the voice said, coldly. "There *is* no public-address system."

The doorbell rang as she poured coffee over a tot of brandy. Damn; of all the times she didn't want to have to be polite to someone.

She set her mug down, shooed Butch away from it, and went to open the door. Richard stood on the mat, his face flushed, eyes furtive.

"Here," he said, pushing a large flower arrangement at her, "these are for you. Sorry I shouted at you."

"Flowers! Why, Richard, thank you. How nice." How quaint! "Like to come in?"

"No, thanks," he said hastily, "I've got an appointment."

At five in the evening? "Sure. Well, thanks again. See you next week."

"Next week?"

"For your lesson?" Why should

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he look startled?

"Oh, right — of course. See you then." He was off down the stairs before she could say good-bye.

Who would have thought it of him? Oh, well, at least the day wasn't a total write-off. She admired the arrangement before setting it on a coaster on the piano, then went to finish her coffee.

After dinner she riffled through her music and pulled out the Schubert setting of "Ave Maria" she was to sing at a wedding next week. Might as well practice something, and the audition aria was spilled milk, that was for sure. Why should those damn judges lie to her?

As she played the slow, rippling introduction, the familiar melody came back to her and she began the long, swelling first note.

Halfway through, the Muzak blared again. She froze and the saccharine chords faded. She drew a deep breath and sang again; it hadn't happened, couldn't happen.

Muzak drowned her out.

Grimly, she tried again, braced this time, and sang on by feel alone until the mushy-sounding changed key by sliding up a half-step — the ultimate banality — and she lost her own tonal center.

She slammed the lid over the keys with a crack that sent Butch streaking for the kitchen.

What the hell was *happening* to her? She felt cold, clammy. Was it some bizarre medical condition? Not tinnitus, anyway: this was no random ringing in the ears.

She jerked open the door of the sideboard and pulled out the Scotch, clanking it against the other bottles, then fetched ice from the kitchen. She swallowed too fast and choked, her mouth burning.

She mustn't panic, that was important. She folded her long legs beneath her on the couch and drank more slowly as she stared at the embroidered Chinese dragon on the wall.

Was there such a thing as an auditory hallucination? But that would mean the Muzak came from her own mind, and she simply didn't believe herself capable of composing such musical schlock. Besides, why should she try to ruin her own career? The alcohol warmed away a chill of fear.

Butch strolled back from the kitchen with a harsh "yarp," her elegant seal points contrasting her madly crossed eyes. Absently Hilary stroked a rhythmic buzz from the cat.

Whom could she turn to for help? Her parents? Mom, as always, would sympathize without the least idea of the problem, stitching away at one of her exquisite and interminable quilts. Dad might surface from an engineering journal long enough to consider how to design a machine capable of creating sound inside someone's head.

She untucked and stretched her

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legs, ignoring Butch's protest. Already her west-facing windows were dimming and the furniture threw long, straight lines of shadow across the room.

Who else? Alan would have helped, would have talked it out with her, but he was long gone. Not a scrap of him was left in the apartment, she'd seen to that. She shifted restlessly, frowning, resisting the memory of the last bitter quarrel and the icy silence that followed.

"I'm just not talented enough for you, am I, Miss Prima Donna? All the effort, the work, the *trying* means nothing to you! You can't imagine what it's like *not* to be so gifted, what it means to sing and sing though you know it's never right, never good enough, and *still* something makes you sing—" He stopped, gasping a breath. "Well, I've had it. I'm through."

The accusation stung, but she refused to plead. Even now the apartment sometimes seemed bleak without him.

Her coffee was cold and Butch had stopped purring; she felt sluggish and heavy. Sliding the Siamese sideways onto the couch, she went to the piano and fingered a scale.

One more time before she admitted it was real. Dutch courage, maybe, but who cared? She tried the Schubert once more.

A loud passage of cream-cheese strings drowned her out.

She snatched her glass to hurl it against the wall; only the cat's sudden frightened movement checked her. She sank back onto the couch.

What had she done to deserve this? It wasn't fair! Her throat ached with the strain of holding back tears. Crying was no help; crying hadn't brought Alan back.

She poured more J&B into the glass and set the bottle near the couch. The coward's way out, but she'd had enough for one day.

She awoke to the dull dread of remembering there was something she feared to remember: it found her within moments. She tried a few listless bars of song in the shower, but the relentless blasts hadn't vanished overnight.

She set the coffee brewing and shook out a bowl of shredded wheat. Halfway through she gave up and set the bowl on the floor for the cats; no sense wasting the milk, anyway.

She could tell her students she was resting her voice. That was plausible, at least for a while. But the wedding and any auditions would have to be canceled. She'd have to withdraw from competitions; one had been by invitation only. The thrill that shot up her spine when she saw the famous address on the envelope! Her fingers whitened where she clenched the coffee mug.

Wandering around the apartment, she dusted and tidied haphazardly,

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keeping her hands occupied. Two students were scheduled this morning, and after lunch she had a class to give at the elementary school. That would be a distraction at least. She grimaced.

There must be *some* way to fight it: she couldn't have struggled this far for nothing. Her talent, honed by years of work and practice, couldn't just vanish overnight.

But then, it hadn't vanished: it was just being blocked. The music was there but couldn't get out. For the first time she could remember, she couldn't sing. She might as well be blindfolded.

A hungry yowl came from the kitchen. She went in and opened a tin of cat food; Motor-mouth raced in from the bedroom, purring and stropping himself against her legs. Butch leaped to the forbidden territory of the counter.

"Get *off*!" Hilary's arm swept the Siamese over the edge in a single sharp motion; she hit the floor with a startled squawk and looked up, crossed eyes reproachful. Hilary struggled with the wave of anger that washed her.

"Sorry, puss." She leaned over and scratched the base of Butch's tail. "But no one's interfering with your life." She left them gulping greedily from their bowls.

The week dragged on. She got through lessons and classes, but the situation couldn't last: how long would students come to a voice teacher who couldn't sing?

Emptied of engagements she could no longer fulfill, the weekend loomed ahead. As she washed the lettuce for a lunch she'd no desire to give, Hilary considered how to fill up the day. The couple across the hall were coming in; she didn't know them well enough to cancel the invitation. Well, at least they wouldn't talk music at her, like her friends.

The monthly concert in the Baroque series was tonight; that would take up an evening. Rubbing salt in the wound, maybe, but she wasn't much interested in movies or plays. Music had always been all she needed. If she couldn't make it herself—"

Angrily she brushed the stinging from her eyes. She was tired, that was all. Tired of contriving, lying, covering up her affliction; tired of fighting off sudden, wild urges to burst into song that came on her like a fierce yearning, a physical craving like that of an ex-smoker for a cigarette.

With a sharp twist she pulled the heart from the lettuce and began tearing up leaves for salad.

The husband was small, with a small paunch and an acne-scarred face. "So, you're the lady who sings."

"I hope it doesn't bother you." Not that she could do much if it did.

"Oh, no, we like it, don't we, Danny?" The wife was plump as well,

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and always looked as if she'd just left the beauty salon.

"Sure. We don't hear that much anyway, except if we're laying around on Saturday."

Damn. Now she'd have to remember not to say "lying around" in case he thought she was correcting his grammar. Why on earth had she invited them?

"I played trumpet for half a year in high school," Danny offered. "But then I kind of, you know, lost interest."

Too lazy to practice, Hilary translated mentally. She passed the salad.

"When I was in school we all had to be in the Glee Club, but they always said to me, 'Don't you sing, Celia. You just stand there and open and close your mouth in time with the words.' " She patted her mouth with her napkin. "I always kind of wished I could sing."

Hilary nodded, unable to think of any polite response, but the wistful phrase struck her. What was it like growing up unable to express yourself in music? She couldn't imagine it.

"Say, honey, maybe the little lady would give you a few lessons."

Celia squealed daintily. "Oh, I'd be too scared, you know, in front of a real singer." But she turned to Hilary with a hopeful, questioning look.

It was the limit; her head began to throb fiercely. "I — I'll have to check my schedule. Maybe I can squeeze you in." Ten to one Celia was a monotone singer: hopeless.

"Gee, that's great. I feel real excited, don't you, Danny?"

"Sure do, honey." He helped himself to another roll.

Hilary managed a smile. At least the concert ticket was in her purse; lunch couldn't last forever.

The theater was nearly full. Hilary accepted a program from an usher and threaded her way past averted knees to her seat. She'd treated herself to one of the most expensive tickets, hoping that any of her friends would sit in the cheaper areas.

She glanced down the sheet, locating the Vivaldi she'd come to hear. There were two concerti listed, the second in in C major for two oboes, two clarinets, and strings. She didn't know that one; it would interesting to hear what Vivaldi had done with the contrasting timbres of single and double reed instruments.

The small orchestra filed in and began tuning. She looked up and noticed choir risers behind the semicircle of orchestra chairs. Suddenly apprehensive, she looked at the program again. It was not, as she thought, purely instrumental. Before the Vivaldi was listed Bach Cantata No. 106, "Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit."

She didn't need to read further. It was scored for two recorders, viola da gamba, and continuo for chorus with bass, tenor, alto, and soprano solos. She knew it by heart. From

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nearly two hundred Bach cantatas they'd picked the one containing her first solo for the Choir College.

The house lights dimmed fractionally, and the conductor strode out to a patter of polite applause. The urge to flee brought Hilary to her feet, but the annoyed glances of her neighbors halted her. Not that she cared what they thought, but if someone she knew saw her rush out — Word would spread, there would be questions, someone would wonder why she was missing auditions. She sank back into her seat as the conductor's baton came down.

At first it was bearable. The opening chorus brought a surprising wave of nostalgia: she almost smiled, thinking of the ridiculous rewordings they'd improvised during rehearsals: "Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit" becoming "Ivory soap, ivory soap, ist die allerbeste, ist die allerbeste soap." Silly, but it had been fun.

The tenor aria followed, and the brief flicker of amusement died. "Ah, Lord, teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." His voice was smooth, mellow, but somehow comfortless.

Then came the robust bass solo, "Bestelle dein Haus!" "Set thine house in order": but how? She began to fold and refold her program.

"Er ist der alte Bund," the chorus sang. "It is the old law; men, you must die." The soprano solo was approaching; inevitable and terrible. She prayed the singer would be bad so it would hurt less. To hear that lovely melody and know she would never sing it again—.Her hands were empty; she looked down and saw her program in shreds on the floor.

The first phrase floated out, clear and pure. "Ja, komm; ja, komm, Herr Jesu, komm...." Hilary's throat tightened, aching; her eyes began to sting and the chorus blurred.

It was too great; she hadn't strength to hold it back. Grief overpowered her. Waves of misery were a physical pain, rolling and crashing through her, and she shook with the force of her sobs. Only years of breathing exercises allowed her to weep in near silence: nothing would make her disrupt the sweet, liquid flow of notes.

The solo finished. The alto began her aria in a rich voice that caressed the text: "Into Thy hand I commit my spirit...." Hilary's tears calmed, and despite swollen eyes, she felt soothed.

As the chorus reached the final fugue, "Durch Jesum Christum, Amen," the tiny flame of amusement flickered to life once more as she saw her old choir director's expression when they'd sung the whole fugue to "a Hershey bar with almonds."

She left at the intermission, but it was no panic-stricken flight. Vivaldi held no terrors for her now.

She woke with the thought clear, articulated in her mind: That's what

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it's like for Celia, for all the ones who want — yearn — to make music, but have little talent. All those feelings you could express only in music were locked up inside them. No wonder even the worst of her students kept coming back, searching for the key.

Butch began to howl and scrape under the bathroom door as Hilary showered. She must have overslept; normally the Siamese behaved herself until at least an hour past breakfast time. She barely had time to dress, fling cat food in the bowls, and gulp half a mug of coffee before the doorbell rang, announcing the day's first student.

"Hi, Jane, come on in. Want some coffee?"

"Please."

"Why don't you go ahead and warm up. I'll be out in a sec." Jane was a good start to the day; she had a pleasant voice, but it was plagued by a breathy quality.

Hilary set the mugs down near the piano. "We're going to tackle your problem with focus today. You've got to channel *all* the air into singing, not let any escape."

Jane sighed, sipping her coffee. "I know what it should sound like, but I can't seem to make it happen."

"Try imagining a spot in the air about four inches in front of your mouth and send all your breath through it." Hilary ran up a C major scale.

"All right." Jane looked doubtful, but set down her cup and stood near the piano. She opened her mouth and breathed in, then stopped, frowning. "It makes me go cross-eyed."

Hilary smiled. "Well, imagine the spot farther away, then."

Jane nodded. She paused, concentrating, then sang. The first three notes were breathy, the fourth and fifth brighter, and the last three shining. She stopped, her mouth still open.

"It works!"

"That was great! Quick, try it again before you forget what it feels like." Hilary crashed out a chord.

Jane sang another scale, the focus wavering in and out, but evident on at least half the notes. "I can tell," she said, her voice thrilled. "It feels different when it's right."

"That's marvelous! Here, try one of the lieder you've been working on." Hilary burrowed eagerly in the stack of sheet music on the piano, pulling out a worn copy of Schumann's "Stille Tränen" and propping it quickly on the stand. "I'll give you four bars intro."

Jane sang again, her new ability under shaky but firming control. In the third line she sang an "A" for a "G"; Hilary stopped to correct her. "In the fifth bar, that's—" and sang the phrase correctly. Then she froze.

There was no blare of Muzak.

Fighting to control her voice, she said, "Do you mind if we try a duet?" Oh, God, let it be true.

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"Sure, but— Are you O.K.?"

"Fine, yes." Maybe great. She propped open another score and played through the introduction with shaking fingers and at least four wrong notes.

But she sang, and the notes spilled out pure, uninterrupted, exuberant.

The lied was finished too soon; she wanted to sing on and on, letting the melody pour from her. Suddenly she realized she'd drowned Jane out.

"Hell, I'm sorry Jane, I didn't mean to do that."

"No, it's O.K., I mean, it was gorgeous. But are you really all right? You looked, I don't know, transcendental."

"I'm fine, really," Hilary answered, grateful that Motor-mouth chose that moment to tip over a coffee cup to get at the dregs.

Jane was quiet, watching as Hilary cleaned up the spill. "Hilary, I know I shouldn't ask, but will I ever be able to sing like that?"

"Of course; look how far you got today." She paused, looking away. "But I hope you never have to."

The second lesson was Richard's; she was wondering if he would come when the doorbell rang. He seemed hesitant, almost reluctant to come in.

Well, maybe he was still embarrassed. "Hi, come in." She shut the door behind him. "So, did you get the part?"

"No. I mean, at least I would have heard by now if I had. You know how it is."

"Never mind, I didn't get anything either. In fact, I really messed up my audition."

"Yeah, uh — I heard."

She glanced at him, curious but unwilling to ask outright. "Coffee? It's decaf."

"Sure."

She'd never known him so tongue-tied. Normally he oozed a superficial charm, when he wasn't sulking. When she came back with the coffee he was sitting on the couch looking helplessly at Butch in his lap. She suppressed a grin; that cat loved shedding on people who disliked him.

"Just dump him off," she said, handing him a mug. Gingerly he slid the cat off. Butch stretched luxuriously and strolled away. There was a pause.

"The flowers have kept well, but they're beginning to wilt," she said. "I'll probably have to throw them out tomorrow." Still no response. He looked pale; was he coming down with flu? "Is — is anything the matter?"

"Well, yeah, sort of." He swallowed. His glance flicked round the room. "You see, I—"

He stopped again, then suddenly rose, went to the piano, and rooted in the flower arrangement, drawing forth a small tube about the size of his thumb.

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"I actually came to get this before they miss it at the lab." He hurried on, his voice defensive. "But I turned it off last night, after I saw you leave the concert. You looked, I don't know...." His voice trailed off.

She stared at him as cold fury filled her. Finally, slowly: "How *dared* you mess around with my mind!"

His eyes evaded her. "You made me angry, furious. I wanted to teach you a lesson, teach you not to be so high-and-mighty. I know it was wrong—"

Wrong? Irresponsible, unethical, obscene!

"— but I was too angry to care. It was stupid. Christ, if anyone found out I took it, they'd have my ass."

Her anger began to drain away as, fascinated, she saw the monumental ego that had shattered her life for a week.

He seemed to take her silence for forgiveness. "I tried it out at the audition, see, from the wings. You should've seen your face!"

"I bet it was a scream." Just a big joke. Hilarious.

"I was going to leave it longer, but then I saw you at the concert; you looked awful, like you had nothing but nightmares for a week. And you'd been crying. I don't know, it didn't seem so funny anymore."

No. No, it wasn't funny.

"So I followed you home — the remote switch works within a range of twenty meters — and turned it off."

She wondered if he would apologize, if he wanted to be forgiven, absolved. She doubted it would occur to him.

The silence stretched out.

"I'm sorry," she said at length.

"What?" For the first time, he met her gaze.

"Well, it didn't work, you see. Your plan, your revenge." She sipped her lukewarm coffee. "We are speaking plainly, aren't we?"

"Sure." He shifted uncomfortably on the sofa.

"True, you made my life hell for a week, but you gave me more than you could ever take away. I learned what it takes some people years to learn, what I doubt you'll ever learn. And that's why you'll never sing, I mean, *really* sing, not just reproduce the notes on the paper. You'll never move an audience to cheer or weep because you care more about what they think of you, of Richard Holden performing, than what you can say to them through the music, what the music makes them feel."

"Does that mean you won't give me any more lessons?" he asked, scowling.

"No, I won't." She sighed. Had he taken in a word she'd said? Not if she was right about him. Well, she'd tried; if he wouldn't accept his own gift, she couldn't help it. "You can find another teacher, of course, but you'll be throwing your money away."

"Yeah, well. Listen, I better be

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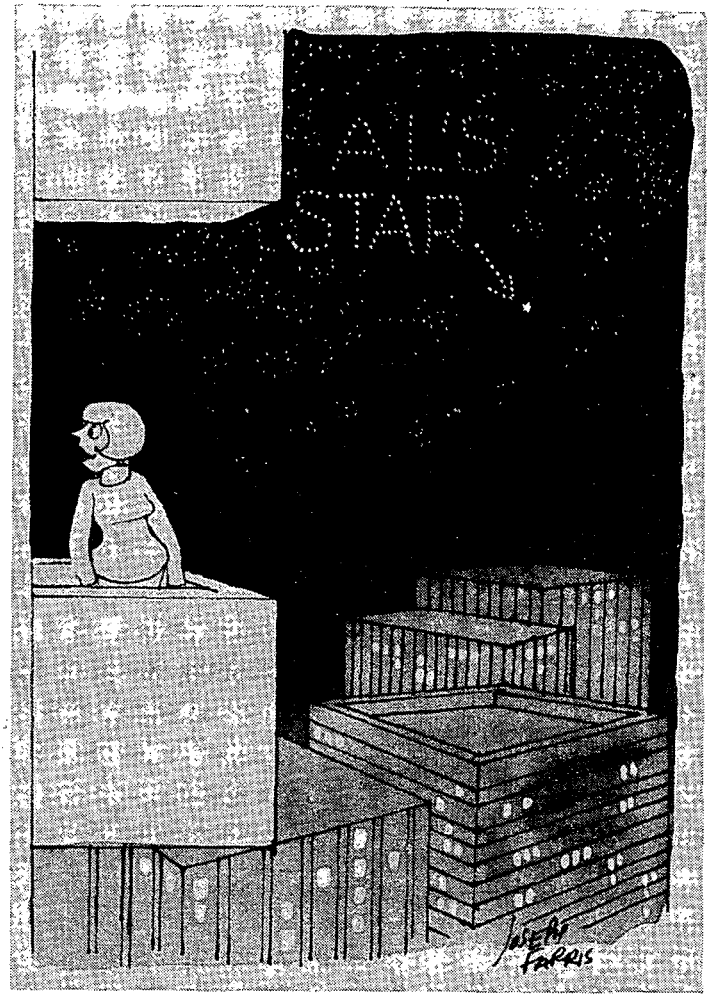
going." He dropped the tube in his jacket pocket and snapped the flap shut carefully. "I've got to sneak this back to the lab before Monday."

She let him out, latched the chain, and turned, leaning her back against the door, eyes closed for a moment.

She went to make a sandwich wondering how she could find out Alan's phone number.



"Al ... come quick!"

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This surprising and not entirely serious tale about a remarkable parrot is from a writer new to F&SF who tells us that she has a degree in physics, worked for NASA, and currently lives near New Orleans with her husband and children. Her stories have appeared in various magazines and anthologies, and her third novel, THE TREASURE IN THE HEART OF THE MAZE, was recently published by Doubleday.

Pieces of Eight

BY
JAYGE CARR

Pieces of eight! Awwwrrrk! Pieces of eight!" The raucous cry split the air, then the bird twisted its head to pick under its wings for fleas.

"Milly," called the husky boy-man in the cut-off shirt and faded jeans. "Milly, will you come and take a look at this mother?"

"Oh, Jake." She frowned over her shoulder, a well-built blonde in flaming pink halter and cut-off shorts that displayed a generous curve of buttock as well as the long length of model-lovely legs. "You come here, this black is adorable."

"No, you come here," he ordered petulantly, the immature whine in his voice contrasting with the easy maturity of his broad shoulders and solidly muscular body.

"What for?" Still holding the squirming black clutched against her side with one arm, she sorted through the wriggling pile of fluff with the other.

"Because." This time it held more command and less whine.

"In a minute." She was balancing two kittens in her hands, as though the final decision would be made by weight.

Her brows raised, and the pet shop proprietor, a well-preserved woman who wouldn't see fifty again, made a moue of between-us-girls understanding. A slight wriggle of Milly's left hand brought the ring with its minuscule diamond into prominence —the tight shorts waistband held its secret well — and the older woman saw, nodded, and her enlarged-by-pince-nez eyes flashed a message: *Start as you would finish, sister.*

Milly grinned, nodding. *I know what I'm doing.* Aloud, almost too sweetly, she said, "I'm coming, dear." The pet shop was so crowded with

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cages and stacks of all kinds of supplies that she had to maneuver, bending and twisting, just to get to Jake's side.

"Pieces of eight." The bird stopped picking at its feathers long enough to greet her. "Awrrrck. Pretty Polly, pretty Polly!" Then it fluffed out its chest and preened.

"It's so big," Milly gasped.

"Yes, he's a particularly lovely specimen of South American Amazon." The pet shop owner had followed Milly (though with more difficulty); now she smoothed the bird's plumage with a proprietary hand. "He talks well, as you can hear, and his colors are—"

"So big." Milly clutched the kittens protectively to her body, as though the curved beak would snatch them, instead of the traditional cracker.

"Better than a yard from tip to tail," his mistress crowed. "Of course, they do come larger, if all you're interested in is mere size, but if you want well-trained speech and brilliant plumage, you can't do better than our friend here."

"Arrrwck! Pieces of eight, pieces of eight! Batten down the hatches! Awrrrck! Repel boarders! Mug o' rum, mug o' rum!"

"He sounds like a pirate taught him," giggled Milly.

"Awwrrrrck. Pretty Polly, pretty Polly," the bird coaxed.

"Polly want a cracker?" Milly asked with another giggle.

"He does have an amazing vocabulary," the owner informed. "I'd guess whoever trained him had quite a sense of humor." With a faint blush, she added, "Not all his comments are fit for mixed company."

"Holy shit! Bring on the wenches! Mug o' rum, mug o' rum!" the parrot bore her out.

"If that's the worst he says...." Jake laughed with the ease of someone who'd used all the four-letter words so often they'd long since lost any real meaning.

"Holy shit," Milly repeated. "Maybe it's somebody who saw that movie, whatever it was, where those three women caught a man and hung him up in a harness. You remember, Jake, he was always saying, 'Holy shit.' "

"Hey, Jack, gotta light," the parrot squawked, somehow managing an unmistakable leer.

"He almost said my name then. Milly, do you think—"

"No, Jake. We agreed. A cat. You know the landlord's rule is No Pets, but he did say that a litter-trained cat—"

"But a bird in a cage—"

"Jake for heaven's sake, look at him. Can you imagine a bird that size in a cage? And whenever we let him out — I'd be cleaning up bird poop from all—"

"You? Honey, you know we agreed to split the chores. If we took him, I'd

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clean up after him, promise I will."

The owner, smelling a much better sale than a mere kitten, broke in with, "It's not as bad as you think. This one's, well, perch-trained. Keep papers under his perch, and that's all you need to do. And he is marvelously well spoken; he must know a hundred different phrases—"

Half an hour later, they were walking out the door, mumbling a confusion of instructions, Jake proudly bearing a covered cage.

"Jake," Millie was saying as the door shut behind them with a satisfied *ka-chunk,* "we're going to regret this."

The proprietor, who had long since established who ran things in her household, shook her head. It's one thing to let the man *think* he's running the things, another to let him grasp the reins in reality.

Milly, how long do parrots live?"

"I don't know. Ten or twenty years, I suppose. Like dogs or cats." She was rinsing the dishes prior to putting them in the automatic, and the smell of stale grease was making her stomach — sensitive these days — churn. She shot a glare toward him over her shoulder that he remained (luckily) oblivious of. Equal shares, humph. For an ex-swinging bachelor, he was suspiciously unadept at certain basic household chores. The ones he didn't like to do, she was sure. If this was going to be a modern, equal relationship—

"It's just, I was kinda thinking, I read somewhere that turtles could live a couple of hundred years. I just wondered if maybe parrots...." His voice trailed off.

"If parrots...." She wiped her hands on a paper towel, tossed it toward the open waste can, missed, and shrugged. She'd get it when she took the garbage out. There were more exciting things to do — she hurried into their miniature living room, smiling. "You think the old lady sold us a bummer, Jake? You think Long John is too old to last—"

"I dunno about lasting, but I think he's old. It's funny, honey. I been listening to him off and on ever since we got him, and—"

"Awwwwrck, pieces of eight, pieces of eight, awwwwrk, dead man's chest, awwwrk," the parrot crowed, and flew around the small room with a flutter of wings that made Milly dash to save the tottering Wedgewood vase her ancient great-aunt Beatrice, the only relative she had left since the auto accident, had given her.

"Awwwwrk, pretty Milly, pretty Milly." The bird seemed to watch with malicious glee her efforts to rescue the teetering vase.

"How can you help listening to him," Milly sneered. "Oh, shut up!" she snapped at the bird.

"Awwwwrk, marooner's cove,

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marooner's cove," the bird unobediently proclaimed.

"Listen." Jake had been reading something; now he closed the book with one finger holding the place. "Listen to him, Milly. You can hear ... some of what he says is in a different accent. It's as if—"

"Holy shit!" the bird screeched, and, disproving once again the pet shop owner's claim, deposited a load on their sleeper-sofa. Milly screeched louder than the bird, and ran for the paper towels and the carpet/upholstery shampooer. It had already become a routine: Grab what she could of the mess with the towels, and use the shampoo to get as much of what was left as possible. "That does it," she panted, scrubbing fiercely at the white foam to force it into the nubby surface. "That does it, Jake Muldoon! It goes! That filthy bird goes!"

Jake jumped to soothe her (metaphorical) ruffled feathers — a task he was becoming adept at with practice — and it wasn't until much later that evening, when they were both in the sleeper-sofa, made into a bed, almost ready to go to sleep, that he got back to the subject of the bird.

"We'll get rid of Long John if you want, love, but I think he's kind of fun."

"You clean up after him, then," she mumbled, already half-asleep.

"Oh, I will, I will," he promised, meaning it utterly — when he said it.

" 'f you say so...."

"It's not just that I want him, I have this idea about him that I want to check out first. If it doesn't go, then we can—"

"Ummmm-hum."

"Remember you said that."

"Ummmmm...."

"*I* said *what*!" Milly faced Jake in the immemorial female pose, hands on hips — except that one hand held a paper towel full of Long John poop, and the other a carpet shampooer sprayer that she looked like she just might aim at Jake and clean him out of her life, too, just like the dirt.

He couldn't stop a slight flush. "You said we could keep him, just a little longer, while I check something out."

She cocked her head and gave him a look not unreminiscent of Long John at his most sardonic. "Just *when* did I make this interesting statement?"

"Last night." Her unbelieving face drove him on. "Late, just before we went to sleep."

"Grapnels, grapnels, board me hearties!" Long John contributed.

"Before *you* went to sleep," she snapped. The gilt was definitely wearing off her romantic dream. "Are you sure you didn't hear a snore and interpret it as a yes?"

He flushed again. "I'm doing it for you. Don't you want a chance to get out of this ratty trap before we're both old and gray?"

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He had successfully sidetracked her. She finished cleaning up after the bird, mumbling. "You know we agreed. It's all we can afford right now."

"If we'd—" he started, but she cut him off. "We *agreed*! We agreed we could do without—" She shuddered. "You know what." She stared up at him, eyes both accusing and pleading. "We can do it, Jake. If we both work hard and save, and you go to night school—"

He used a word that wasn't in Long John's vocabulary — yet. "We'll work hard — until you can't. You know you don't make enough to pay for sitters, after. So it's all gonna be me. Night school! Sure. *If* I can, and *if* I pass, and *if* there's a job waiting when I do. Honey," he knelt, taking both her hands, paper towels and shampoo and all, "Long John could get us out *now*."

"Jake, she shook her head. "Nobody or nothing is going to get us into or out of anywhere but *us!* It's a dog-eat-dog world, and if we don't take care of ourselves, who will? But we can do it, Jake, I know we can. Just work hard, and stick to it, and—"

"I already said I was willin'," he said softly but firmly. "But if there's a better way, we'd be fools not to try for it, instead of spending our lives slaving. Long John may be a slim chance, but—"

"Oh, Jake," she said sadly, pulling away. She dumped the paper towel in the waste can and put the shampoo on a handy shelf, then washed her hands at the tiny sink, spattering some water on Long John, who rewarded her with his choicest curses, some of which were old-fashioned enough to make her giggle, and restore her good humor. "I know what you're getting at, Jake. The lady who sold him to us was wrong, he's not a South American whatsit after all, he's really a rare Tutti-Fruitti bird from the wilds of Outer Blankia, and the Audubon Zoo is willing to pay a million bucks for him."

"As a matter of fact, I looked him up during my lunch hour today, and he doesn't quite fit any of the descriptions." She shrugged and perched her still-slim self on the edge of the old-fashioned grooved porcelain sink. "But that's not important," he went on. "What's important is the way he talks, and that parrots are known to live for a long, long time." He lowered his voice, as though there were someone to hear besides Milly and Long John, who had managed to swipe some of Jake's beer and was staggering around gasping and proclaiming, "Drink and the devil, hic-*cup*. Drink and the devil, jug o' rum, awwwck!"

"Listen, Milly, dammit. Listen. Some of what he says sounds different. You know, when he says, 'Pieces of eight,' it's really, 'P'ices of aye't.'"

"So?"

His voice sunk lower. "'P'ices of

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aye't.' Like a real pirate would say it."

"Oh, *Jake!*" She started laughing so hard she fell off her sink perch. "You think a *real* pirate taught him! Why there haven't been any real pirates for hundreds of years."

"You dumb Yankee! Haven't you ever heard of Jean Lafitte?"

"Oh, sure. And Blackbeard and Henry Morgan. You really think ol' Long John is three or four hundred years old?"

"Dunno about the others—" He glared at her and suddenly realized what was wrong with the staggering bird and hurriedly moved the rest of temptation out of his reach. "Jean Lafitte fought with Andy Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, about a hundred and fifty years ago. And he wasn't the only pirate around here then, either, just the most famous one."

She sat back on the floor with a loud plop. "You're serious. You think Long John belonged to a pirate because — because you think he sounds like one."

"Sometimes. Just sometimes. Listen: Marooner's Cove, Long John. Marooner's Cove." He did his best to give the last phrase the odd Cockney/British Tar accent he thought of as "pirate."

"Awwwrk. Marooner's Cove, low tide, middle of the beach, fifty paces in. Awwwwrk, pieces of eight, pieces of eight."

"Jake! Jake, you're not *serious* about all this!"

"Maybe." He glared around at peeling paint, erratic appliances, walls so thin they knew their neighbor's business better than the neighbors. "This place — wouldn't you do almost anything to get out of here, Milly?"

"Wellllllll...."

"It's no use, Jake. We've checked every atlas here. There is no Marooner's Cove." Jake and Milly stared disconsolately at each other over the hard wooden surface of the library table.

"May I help you?" said the wiry man with the neat moustache.

"No. I don't think—" Jake started, but Milly interrupted him.

"Maybe you can." Milly awarded the man her best smile. "A friend of ours was telling us a story about her great-grandparents. It seems they lived a long time in a place called Marooner's Cove. Jane didn't know where it was, but it sounded terrific. Well, our vacation is coming up, and besides the swimming and fishing and beach and all, it would be fun to take snaps to show Jane where her own folks lived, long ago. Only" — her best helpless look — "we can't find anything about it."

"Hmmmmmm." The librarian pursed his lips. "Can't say I've heard of it, either. Sounds like something out of Treasure Island, you know."

Milly squeaked, but Jake managed a weak, "Never read it."

"You should. It's not just a classic,

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it's very enjoyable. One of the characters is called Ben Gunn, he's been marooned on the island, the treasure island, for years, and when the treasure seekers come—" The glazed look in two pairs of eyes told him he had lost his audience; he sighed, but knew better (long experience) than to continue to push his own enthusiasms. "Well, let's see where you've been looking. Why, these are all modern atlases. Hasn't it occurred to you that Marooner's Cove might be a local name, and an old one, that wouldn't likely be listed here?"

"Oh," Jake sighed glumly.

"But if you were to look at some of the older atlases in the restricted section, or an historical atlas or two—"

"Older atlases?"

"Yes." Pride made him glow. "We have atlases going all the way back to the early 1800s. There's a handwritten one — under glass, I'm afraid — that goes back prior to the Battle of New Orleans—" He smiled at the sudden hope on two young faces. "Usually we don't let any but legitimate scholars back in the restricted areas, but you just want that one item of information.... It would be a pleasant surprise for your friend, now wouldn't it? I think I can trust you—"

"We're in big trouble." Jake scowled as he kicked a pebble into the street, not looking back at the facade of the library.

"But we know where it is now; we found it on the old map and matched it to the new one. It can't be more than a couple of hours away—"

"I just thought," he moaned. "Beach. There's a whole string of beaches along the coast. If they're not public and full of vacationers and swimmers, they'll be private and we'll be trespassing."

"So?" Milly shrugged, causing at least two male passersby to trip over their own feet, while staring. "So what? We'll just locate the place during the day, and come back at night—"

"But — but — suppose it is private property? You know we could never afford to buy beach property, we can't afford—"

She gave him her best *You're dumb!* look. "Finders, keepers," she said briskly.

"But—"

"Who started that get-out-of-the-apartment, anyway?" she sneered. "Whassamatter, you decided you like cockroaches?"

He had to grin. "Haven't been any since Long John came. You think he eats them?"

"If so, it's the one useful thing about him," she muttered. Then, louder: "You were the one who said, *Do anything,* weren't you?"

Two shadowy figures crept through the long, uncut weeds toward the strip of sand, shimmering ghostlike in the pale quarter-moonlight. A blade

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clinked against a rock.

"Hush!" hissed Jake. "Be careful!"

"There aren't any houses anywhere near," Milly spat back. "We've walked miles!"

"No houses we've seen," Jake retorted, low-voiced. "Who knows what's around here."

"Pieces of eight," squawked a muffled voice.

"Keep him quiet," Jake snarled.

"*You* keep him quiet," Milly bit out. "You're the one who insisted on bringing him."

"Because he might—"

"Say something, I know. Sure he's going to — *Ouch!*"

"I said, be quiet!"

"How can you be quiet when you're falling!" She was already scrambling back to her feet, gathering her equipment. "I *told* you we needed flashlights."

"And I told *you,* we don't want somebody seeing the lights and investigating—"

"My ankle hurts!"

"Can you walk on it?" he gritted out.

Reluctantly: "Yes."

"Then, come on, we've only got a few hours."

"We've two weeks, we both took off for two—"

"I know that," he said with an impatient snort. "But do you really think if whoever owns this place comes and finds holes we've dug, we'll be able to come back the next night and do some more digging without somebody waiting, maybe with guns, sure with the fuzz."

"Oh! I didn't think—"

"You never do." She flinched, knowing what he was referring to, though it was his fault as much as hers. "Come on!"

She followed the steady thump of his footsteps, muttering.

"Here we are." He began dumping his equipment any which way on the sand.

"Jake," she wailed, seeing something as she bent to follow suit. "Jake, I tore my jeans on that barbed wire."

"I'll buy you new ones," he muttered, looking right and left, trying to locate the midline of the tiny beach. "Designer ones, with real gold trim."

"I'm *bleeding!*"

"Oh, for — if we miss low tide, we won't be able to — let me see," he finished as she wailed again.

"Skin feels and looks smooth," he announced, after kneeling and inspecting the damage. "It must have just been a shad—"

Click. It was no louder than a light-switch. But a blacker-than-black cylinder of *something* sprang up around them. Yet despite the blackness of whatever surrounded them, there was light, a strange yellow-green glow that seemed to have no single origin; it just existed. Milly screeched and grabbed at Jake. Jake gulped and grabbed at Milly.

From the heights of the cylinder, a

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figure began descending slowly, rather like a man riding in a glass elevator. Except that there wasn't any sign of an elevator, and the figure couldn't possibly have been a man.

"Run, Milly!" Jake hauled her to her feet and charged for the nearest black curves, meaning to smash through and keep on running.

Except that he merely bounced off the black surface, spilling himself and Milly neatly to the ground —now also a smooth black — while the whatever-it-was landed as softly as a dandelion puff.

Jake and Milly stared, unbelieving. It was roughly the height of a man, and there all resemblence ended. Four elephantine legs supported a bulbous body with no indication of head or neck, but with a scatter of arms or tentacles or *something*. The major color was a sort of burnt orange, with patches of olive green and indigo blue that could have been coverings of some sort, or merely chunks of loose integument. A low rumble issued out of it — from somewhere — and Milly screeched again and buried her face in her hands.

"Lay one hand on Milly, whatever you are—" Jake challenged, squaring his shoulders and clenching his fists.

Paying neither of them any heed, the being sauntered over — its four legs lending it a definite rolling gait —to the pile of equipment. One of its arms(?) snaked the cover off Long John's cage. Another swift movement, and the cage was open and the bird hopped out. " 'Bout time, Loysvitch," he squawked.

The being rumbled.

"Local language, Loysvitch. Local language. English. Sent you the gen. Here, take a look. Brought you the new cargo. How do you like it?"

The being didn't turn, but Jake shivered. He'd had the sudden feeling of tiny fingers sieving through his body, poking through his mind with careless, casual ease. Beside him, Milly gasped and shuddered, and he tightened the arm he'd put round her shoulders.

The alien rumble that might have been speech filled the black cylinder.

"Now when have I ripped you off, Loysvitch? These are young and healthy, a breeding pair, no less."

"Long John!" Milly gasped in outrage. Then, eyes widening as she put it together before Jake could sort out "breeding pair" and be insulted: "Long John, what have you done!"

"Awwwwrk, pieces of eight," he snickered. Then: "Given you what you wanted so much, Milly. I've gotten you out of that ratty apartment."

"But I never wanted—" She started sobbing.

"What's going on?" Jake clenched his fists again, ready to fight — if only he knew whom and where.

"He's *sold* us," Milly sniffled. "To that — that — *thing!*"

"What!" Jake exclaimed, while the "thing" rumbled again.

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"Tell them you'll be nice, Loysvitch," Long John snickered. "In English."

"Be nice." It sounded like a train speaking, but was reasonably understandable. "Come wiv me, Loysvitch be goodgood."

"No!" Milly screamed, while Jake agreed. "Not on your life!"

Long John produced a braying cackle. "Don't worry, Jake, he'll clean up after you until you're ship-trained. And — he never separates a breeding pair, especially not Terran lovebirds."

"But, Long John, *why*?" Milly said numbly.

"Pieces of eight," he said, with an avian shrug. "We don't use your money, or money as such, but we have an equivalent. If you must know, I'm working my way through — call it college." Another raucous cackle. "It's a dog-eat-dog universe, remember, Milly? If I don't take care of me, who will?"

"No," Jake leaped for Loysvitch, fists pounding. But he never got there. Out of nowhere, it seemed, glittering strands wrapped around him. Between one step and the next, he became a mummy and began to fall. But even as he lost his balance, he was rising, his struggles muted by the strands, but not his curses.

"Jake!" Milly sailed to her feet, her arms outstretched after the disappearing figure.

"He'll be O.K., Milly," Long John informed. "And you'll be back together soon. Just remember, Loysvitch allows every dog one bite, and he prefers the carrot to the stick —though he will use the stick. Not to worry, though, you two are bright kids, fast learners. You'll be fine."

"I want to go home!"

"You be goodgood, I be goodgood," Loysvitch rumbled.

"I want to go *home*!"

"Your home's with Loysvitch now." From the top of the cylinder, another figure floated down.

This one was a man, dressed in casual clothes, jeans and a T-shirt. As soon as his feet touched, Milly flung herself at him. "Mister, help me, get me out of here, *do* something—"

But the man just stood, in the same pose he had landed in, and Long John cackled again. "He's not real, Milly, he's just a programmed mechanical. He's going to take me—"

She flinched away, as though the unmoving figure had suddenly gotten red-hot. "To another pet store," she accused. "So you can be sold again, and catch another victim. What do you do" — her lip curled in a sneer —"if your new *owner* isn't suitable?"

He cackled. "I hook a friend, then. Piece of eight. The right bait, and I can take my choice." The mechanical held out an arm, and Long John hopped onto it, and preened a wing. The mechanical started toward the nearest black curve.

"Long John, you can't do this! Didn't I take care of you?"

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"Sure, Milly. Give you something in return. Omnuus navft." The pair were stepping *through* the wall.

"Omnuus navft! What's that, Long John?" she cried frantically.

But they were through, and there was a sensation of rising, as a slow but smooth elevator. Long John's last answer echoed thinly.

"Pieces of eight!"

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Ever wonder why some rock groups make it big and some don't? In "Armageddon Between Sets," Edward Bryant ("In the Shade," October 1982) tunes in on rock, going behind the scenes to find there are some hot deals an up-and-coming group could do without.

Armageddon Between Sets

BY
EDWARD BRYANT

At first I thought the audience at Sawney Beane's was dead — but then I considered the group onstage.

Armageddon throbbed and howled in the darkness.

Hold on, woman. It's Halloween and many things are not as they seem. So many marvelous masks....

The Reverend Sloan Robbins was not the sort of man many who knew me would easily have placed among my circle of friends. ("Uh, Angie, Sloan's ordained in just about as apocalyptic an evangelical denomination as anyone could imagine. What have you got in common?") You'd be surprised.

I'd known him a long time. Sloan had almost taken me to the junior prom when we were both in high school. That prospect had certainly delighted my parents. Sloan was a PK — preacher's kid. Adhering to the stereotype, he had raised a little quiet hell ever since grade school. Never anything too serious — more the sort of mischief you'd expect from boys named Tom and Huck than, say, Leopold and Loeb. It was a more innocent place and time than now. I know *I* was innocent.

Sloan had wanted to avoid the frivolity of prom. I simply had wanted not to partake of the company of idiots. Our respective parents had other ideas, and what they set up smacked almost of arranged marriage. Dutiful kids, we both caved in when pressed. It turned out not to be so bad, but only because Sloan and I never actually went to the prom. The two of us ended up talking and drinking coffee all night at the Wagon Wheel Café & Truckstop. The long-haul jockeys kept looking at us like we were figures in a

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Norman Rockwell painting.

When he was a senior, Sloan decided to convert to Catholicism. This didn't completely enchant his father, the Unitarian minister. The good news came just before graduation: Sloan was giving up the Holy Mother Church. The bad news was the he was searching for a religion with more structure.

Uncle Sam drafted Sloan right out of high school and promptly shipped him to Vietnam as a grunt. We exchanged letters every few weeks. Sloan signed for a second hitch in hell, but never made it. He was shipped home with enough shrapnel — as my father put it — to make it impossible for him ever to navigate in the woods with a magnetic compass.

He also came home with strange eyes, wary eyes, eyes that kept looking past you, searching out the glint of a weapon. Not that Sloan was now some stereotype of a war-torn, brain-blasted vet. But he had seen things, done things, and he was changed.

After he got out of Fitzsimons, the VA hospital, Sloan found the right religion and was ordained in a ceremony I declined to attend.

In the meantime, I had become a witch. Or, more precisely, realized I was one. Self-recognition of my powers had come slowly, over the course of a difficult puberty. Later it gave me the means to a marginal living. My business card said simply, "Consultant." It sometimes surprised me how many people still believed.

Sloan and I stayed in communication on a sometimes tense, but generally cordial level. He married a woman from his congregation whom I privately considered to be a unconscionably bland and dependent woman, and had four children by her. I once wandered accidently into the same Sunday brunch as the six of them. The four girls were all dressed in neat color coordination with their mother's outfit. I thought about a line of ceramic ducks in graduated sizes marching forever across a close-cropped suburban lawn.

I know Sloan believed me, on whatever level, to be a whetstone or sounding board or some such similar image, for his rigorous mind. I knew no one gave him arguments at home, so I would debate with him. That's something he reveled in. For years we'd met in discreet, neutral territory for coffee and talk. It was all innocent; though, for obvious reasons, Sloan preferred not to have nosy members of his congregation see him in public company of a woman not his wife. My own thoughts were sometimes other than innocent. Had the world been different and the both of us willing, I could have chosen worse lovers than Sloan Robbins.

For a long time I don't think he really believed that I was seriously involved with what he lumped together and carelessly termed "the dark forces." "Gray" would have been a

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more accurate adjective. Sloan thought I was, at worst, a misguided dilettante. That was probably just as well. Confirmation that I sometimes compounded love philters for pay and hired out fascination spells for job-seekers wouldn't have set well. As long as he didn't take me completely seriously, we could continue our meetings.

But lord! the man could be obstinate.

It was the afternoon of Halloween.

When it's at its best, autumn is my favorite season. Today struck me as a consummate fall day: blue skies, a storm brewing ominously above the mountains to the west, just enough chill to require wearing a jacket, half the leaves yet to fall, and a crisp smell and touch to those already fallen.

Crisp and chill. Those adjectives could also have described Sloan's tone the past fifteen minutes. We sat opposite in a green plastic-upholstered booth in a small coffee shop on Colfax. We'd been discussing (too polite a word) religious observances for this holiday. My church, not his. Sloan had suggested that maybe I should be out in a national forest dancing naked around a Halloween pole. He felt I was in a put-up-or-shut-up position. I told him to shut up, that sarcasm didn't befit a man of the cloth. Sloan appeared to brood over his fifth cup of coffee. I didn't worry. Sloan gave me the same hard time *every* Halloween. It was a fall ritual. His sense of humor was austere, but it was there.

As every other Halloween, I would have launched enthusiastically into the issue of differentiating between individual and collective observance. But today I just didn't feel like it. What I wanted was to suggest to Sloan that we go out into the neighborhood and tramp noisily through piles of leaves.

Then someone put a handful of coins into the jukebox. The new Stray Cats '45 hammered across the coffee shop.

"*That's* what I mean," said Sloan, slapping the flat of his hand down on the table and making the coffee cups jump.

"What?" I'd been daydreaming.

"It's the tool of the dark, Angie." I must have looked like I hadn't been paying attention. He added, "... rock and roll."

"That?" I gestured toward the jukebox and realized I had to raise my voice to overcome the wail of the guitars. "Rock and roll's just good, clean fun. Or is that your point?"

"That music possesses an unwholesome power."

"If you're considering wattage and energy conservation." I wasn't sure if I should take this seriously.

"Did you read the paper this morning?"

I nodded.

"Page one?"

I should have realized where this was heading. In the past ten days four different Denver rock-'n'-roll clubs had

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been robbed by what a sole witness had described as a brown-and-white combo: one Anglo and one Hispanic male. In each case a female employee had been abducted and later found dead. In every case the women had been raped. Even as relatively delicate as the media description had been, it seemed that sexual molestation and murder had been combined in ways that made me feel both a queasiness in my belly and a steady flame of rage.

"I don't think you can blame the music," I said.

"It's symptomatic," said Sloan, "of what's bred from the shifting sands of secular humanism." His jaw set in the manner of a portrait of Cotton Mather I'd once seen in Massachusetts.

"The alliteration's terrific," I said. "The logic escaped me."

"And the metaphor's twisted." Sloan's facade cracked slightly. "I'm quite serious, though." The beginnings of his smile vanished. "Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. That's the buzz phrase, isn't it? It's a code for death and damnation. The young just don't know what they're flirting with. Those who play the music are the seducers—"

"Sloan," I said, "*I* used to play in a rock-and-roll band." It was a long time before. I'd played bass for a five-person garage band called Borgia Peach.

"I take it your intelligence caused you to learn better," said my friend.

"My bank account did." The group hadn't lasted long because we each had to make a living, and music for us, at that time, simply wasn't the right place. Some of the group had got back in since; I hadn't.

"Too many youngsters," said Sloane, "base their actions on the lyrics of John Lennon rather than on the holy and inerrant Word of God."

"You're picking on the wrong guy," I said patiently. "In any case, you're misinterpreting something that essentially translates as exuberance and the desire to shock their elders." After a few seconds, I changed the subject. "Want to take a walk and smell the burning leaves?"

The Stray Cats' side had ended. A young woman with permed brown hair put more money into the jukebox, and Bruce Springsteen took us to the darkness at the edge of town.

"Actually," said Sloane, "I wouldn't mind smelling some burning vinyl."

"Really?" Sometimes he did irritate me.

"Really."

I leaned toward him and said lightly, "So are you going to emulate your compatriots down South? Have the teenagers in your flock pile their Rolling Stones and Plasmatics albums in a great heap and set them afire?"

Sloan looked at me with a serious expression and nodded slowly. "If it's the only way to penetrate their young world with the convincing message of Christ."

"Sloan!" I raised my voice. "You're

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turning into a facist prig. Are you going to use the Bill of Rights as kindling?"

"Angie," he said patiently, "I wouldn't even entertain the notion if I didn't think it would contribute to building God's nation. There's cause."

He had started to color, patches of red spreading out across his cheekbones. Then he sighed. "Don't trot out the old, tired arguments, Angie. I'm not a Nazi, and I am not a burner of witches."

"So defend it without falling back to religious cant." The couple in the next booth were ostentatiously ignoring the volume of our voices. I suddenly remembered that Sloan wasn't raising *his* voice.

"It's as much a matter of symbol as content," he said. "That music counters structure and order and God's discipline. It is an agent of anarchy." Sloan paused reflectively to sip his coffee. "I was awash in that blood-dimmed tide, Angie. For fourteen months I did my level best to stay afloat. Now I quite literally will be damned before I'll allow the forces of the dark to engulf my country and family." The heat in his voice had nearly reached incandescence.

"That's a heavy load to lay on a popular entertainment."

"You know better." He cocked his head and looked at me obliquely. "Don't you?" I said nothing. "Examine the words," he continued. "The elements are hardly subtle. Promiscuity, drug usage, situational ethics, all the excesses of secular liberalism.... Entropy has no greater ally."

"Come on," I said, forcing myself to cool down. "It's only rock and roll...."

"And the rhythms," Sloan continued inexorably. "Even the subsonics are calculated to seduce not only the intellect but the spirit."

"Exactly," I said. Not a good idea to be flip, I thought, but it was too late. "Jungle drums right out of the psyche of the primitive." I remembered the feeling of the last time I'd gone dancing. "So what's wrong with that?"

"It's insidious behavior modification," said Sloan, "and not for the better. I know you believe in evolution, Angie. The sort of music I'm objecting to has set our young on an opposite road. In truly important respects, they're devolving—"

I wanted to smile, but didn't. "Horse crap," I said.

We looked sourly at each other.

"Snappy comebacks are no substitute for hard spiritual truth," said Sloan. "I'd like to be able to prove it to you." His voice was conciliatory. "Until you understand that this music is a tactic of the Adversary—"

I interrupted him. "Let me prove something to you." Sloan looked at me expectantly. "Can you meet me tonight?" I'd *show* him. "About ten?"

"I've got to help Ruth deal with the trick-or-treaters," said Sloan. "That'll be over by seven. The girls will be in

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bed by nine. I suppose I can meet you. Are you going to explain this?"

I gave him an address on Broadway. He copied it on an offering card he took from a shirt pocket. "A vision is worth a thousand words," I said.

He answered, "I'll trust you," and smiled.

That was it for coffee. Sloan had to go meet with the church building-fund people. I would have to go kick through the piles of leaves alone.

We paid at the counter and left. I glanced at the *Rocky Mountain News* vending machine on the sidewalk. The headline read: FOURTH VICTIM FOUND IN PLATTE. CLUB KILLERS SOUGHT.

Sloan was looking at the headline, too.

"Forgiveness even for them?" I said.

"Punishment is exclusively the province of the Lord," Sloan said softly, "even though we face a hard temptation to take it on ourselves."

I took his hand and squeezed it. "See you at ten."

We went our separate ways.

I had neglected to tell Sloan that this evening's affair was a costume event. I hadn't wanted to push things. It would be touchy enough with the music. Naturally, I hadn't mentioned dancing. I decided that I wanted to wear something other than my usual jeans and T-shirt or business outfit, so I drove to Denver Costume on Larimar. The two-level brick warehouse structure was as crowded as one might expect on Halloween afternoon. Since I was one of them, it didn't seem appropriate to sneer at last-minute shoppers.

When I finally got the attention of a clerk in the dim, hurried interior, I told her what I wanted.

"Oh, sure," she said brightly. "We ordered lots of those. Everybody wants them this year."

I'd never expected to be part of a fad.

The clerk led me to the proper section far back on the second floor, and I rifled through witches' clothing and paraphernalia. I chose a slinky, low-cut black dress that reminded me of Vampira, and that fit me just slightly more than perfectly.

I hesitated, then took a high-peaked, broad-brimmed black hat with a black lace veil.

"How about a stuffed cat?" said the clerk.

"No." I'm afraid my offended look made her recoil.

On the way home, I drove twice slowly around the block looking at the immoderate Victorian mansion I wanted someday to buy and renovate. Then I returned to my rather more modest apartment and took a bath. I dried myself and dressed in time to admire the setting sun.

Set in an unassuming business block near Broadway and Alameda, Sawney Beane's was Colorado's fore-

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most rock club. Named for a dubious fifteenth-century Scottish folk hero and spiritual ancestor of Alferd Packer, America's only convicted cannibal, Sawney's was an electric live showcase for punk, new wave, rockabilly, or any other music one could start off practicing in one's garage.

I parked the Audi at 9:45 and waited on the sidewalk outside Sawney's. Chinook winds had dipped across the city after sundown, so it wasn't particularly cold yet. The poster beside the door read simply: TONIGHT! ARMAGEDDON. They were a pretty fair band I'd heard play before. I also knew the brother-and-sister lead singers, Rick and Maggie. They'd been in Borgia Peach with me, all those years before. My opinion was that neither had ever quite gotten it together musically, but each had a hell of a lot of promise.

While I waited, I watched the clientele drift in and out of Sawney's. The flow was mainly in. Most were in costume. There were a lot of traditional outfits: pirates, clowns, Star Wars characters, rabbits, cowboys, hippies, Regency ladies, werewolves, and so on. Perhaps a quarter of the costumes reflected topical concerns: recombinant DNA chimera, contaminated pharmaceuticals, radiation victims, and a president of the United States made up as a vampire.

"Angie?" Sloan's voice was to my side, the tone slightly tentative. I turned, raised my veil, looked at him, and started to laugh. He was wearing a black suit, immaculately pressed, with a flat-crowned western hat. He wore a clerical collar.

"I'm sorry," I said, trying to say it soberly. "You look like a circuit preacher."

"It isn't Sunday, unfortunately," Sloan said, "but it's my Sunday best."

Good for you, I said silently. It may be grim, but your humor's still there. "Ready to go in?" I said aloud.

He nodded and offered me his arm. "Perhaps I'll find some missionary work within." We entered Sawney Beane's. The place was constructed along the lines of a bowling alley, longer than it was wide. The lights were dim, but the smoke lowered the lumen level even further. Breakers of laughter and boisterous conversation crashed against us, outshone only by the reggae tape on the house sound system. The humidity was high in here, and I could smell a few unwashed bodies. Getting through the crowd was a matter of negotiation. We moved past the long oak bar on our right and looked for a table.

Obviously, I had done something right and was being rewarded. I spotted a tiny table with two chairs, a candle, and an ashtray, close to the dance floor. We beat another couple to it and found ourselves about twenty feet from the stage. The equipment was already set up, but I saw no one from Armageddon other than a couple of

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surly-looking roadies keeping watch over the gear.

It was crowded in here. I would have to be careful not to set an elbow by accident on a neighboring table. I blew out the candle. Sawney's didn't need any additional heat. Someone in the control booth gave the stage lights another run-through; red, blue, and yellow flashed.

Sloan said something as I tried to attract the attention of a server.

I raised my voice. "What?"

He leaned across the table and said, "Are you sure we'll be able to hear the music from here?"

"Believe it." A server approached. I ordered Tres Equis in the bottle and Sloan ordered club soda with lime. He scooted his chair a little closer so that he could talk into my ear.

"So," he said. "Now that we're settled, what are you going to show me?"

"I know this group. They're a high-energy, good-time bunch of musicians. You're going to see people enjoying themselves in a relaxed, nonthreatening, basically wholesome atmosphere."

"Perhaps," said Sloan. "Forgive me, but I suspect I'm going to see neo-Pagans abasing and abusing themselves in an abysmal atmosphere of sleazy license."

Fortunately, our drinks arrived. Then a large man in a bear suit lurched toward us and jostled the table. Both Sloan and I grabbed for our toppling drinks. The ursine man stared down at Sloan. Sweat glistened on his face. "That's a great outfit, Rev. You oughta get the prize for most authentic. Maybe next year you can try something more cheerful? Too depressing, man." He staggered away. Sloan looked bemused.

"Never mind," I said hurriedly.

"Hi, guys," said a tall, slender woman in a lion tamer's costume complete with pith helmet and whip. "Having a good time?" I stared a moment, then recognized the clear gray eyes and the strong features beneath the makeup.

I introduced Kate Shiner to Sloan, who stood to shake her hand. "Kate manages this place," I explained.

"Only barely," she said. "Tonight's a zoo."

"Rick and Maggie and the rest going to be in top form?"

Kate seemed to hesitate. "I hope so."

"Something wrong?" I suddenly recognized the tension in her posture.

Kate hesitated again. "Armageddon's changed," she said. Then she shook her head and added, "I've got to go and take care of things. Enjoy the show." She headed toward the back, where the office and dressing room were.

"She seems quite reasonable." Having made the comment, Sloan leaned back and sipped his soda.

We both settled ourselves and waited for the performance. Rock shows are always late.

The stage lights came down at 10:25, and darkness enveloped our whole end

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of the club. The p.a. crackled, and we heard Kate's voice: "Sawney Beane's welcomes you all to our annual Halloween celebration. Tonight let's offer a real mountain welcome to Armageddon in this, their final Denver club appearance before leaving on national tour." Oh, I thought. National tour? I hadn't heard about this. Rick and Maggie must be scenting success. I wondered where the money was coming from.

The lights started to come up, then stopped somewhere in the dim range. There they were on stage. Armageddon. A few people at the tables clapped, then stopped self-consciously when they noticed no one else was doing anything. I was one.

A single guitar chord ripsawed out of the smoky dimness, answered by a vibrating Farfisa note from the keyboard player. A gut-level bass chord started to churn.

It was as though we were all leaning forward, trying to *see* what played onstage. The lights came up a little further. I recognized the members of Armageddon.

But they *were* changed. Kate Shiner was right.

Rick and Maggie stood bracketing the mike at center stage. Lou was on drums. Lorelle's fingers played over her keyboard. George and Mad Howard were at lead and bass. Rick and Maggie both wore black skintights. The rest of the band were in their usual neo-punk assemblages of muscle shirts, button-downs, or horizontal-striped jerseys.

They were all wearing makeup — not the Kiss-type of baroque decoration, but some blue/green-based flat color that made their skin look like cold clay. There was darkness under their eyes, and their facial bones pressed skeletally against taut skin.

There was something appalling and dead about them. The audience didn't react at all.

"Those are your friends?" Sloan whispered.

"They *were*," I said, eyes fixed on Rick and Maggie. "I've never seen them like this."

Rick seemed to smile at me and his teeth shone like weathered ivory as the spot irised down. The atonal introduction ended and Armageddon slammed into their first set.

The audience warmed uncertainly as Armageddon did a rapid string of familiar pieces. I knew Rick was writing originals, but none of them were in evidence yet.

I had to admit I had never heard Armageddon play this well before. They were all *on*, every player interlocking with the others perfectly. The music twisted and wailed around us like a Kansas funnel cloud. Even Sloan seemed drawn in. I couldn't catch his eye as he stared across at the group.

Armageddon started off with "Sympathy for the Devil." Then, with no pause, they launched into a solid version of Warren Zevon's "Excitable

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Boy." A few costumed dancers got out on the floor. The rest of us sat like rodents pinned by the sardonic stares of cobras.

I realized Armageddon was doing cover versions with significant differences from the originals. The music itself was very accurate, but the lyrics had undergone mutation. The maddening thing was that the altered versions were so effective, they blocked my memories of what the words *should* be. It did seem to me that the new versions were beyond ominous, somehow menacing.

The band slid into "Promise in the Dark." It wasn't the Pat Benatar song I remembered. As with the others, things had changed. The promises, the whispers in the dark were different. I couldn't quite make out the specific words, and I wasn't sure I wanted to.

Armageddon did something of Dire Straits and the Clash, something from *The Wall* and the Police, others. They wound up with David Bowie: "... putting out the fire with gasoline...." and that was it.

The lights came up a bit more. Fewer people clapped than the performance warranted. Armageddon had indeed been good, but the audience was unsettled. Murmurs ran around the large room as though people were afraid to raise their voices in talk.

Sloan turned away from the stage toward me. "So that's live rock 'n' roll?" he said. I looked from him to Armageddon and said nothing. I shivered. With the club packed with people, it was now cold, an almost arctic chill.

In what seemed almost a parody of required bar band protocol, the members of Armageddon circulated out into the audience during the break, sat down at various tables, ordered drinks, and just generally mixed. Even the roadies did so. Rick and Maggie stayed almost as close as Siamese twins and came our way, pausing in front of the table. Maggie looked nonplussed; Rick's neutral expression didn't change.

"Good set," I finally said.

It was as though I'd said nothing. Maggie put a hand on my wrist. "Angie, what are you doing here?"

I belabored the obvious. "The party," I said. "The music."

"Who's your friend?" said Rick. The words were flat. I introduced Sloan, and Rick slowly extended his hand. Sloan started to shake hands, but abruptly jerked his hand away when it touched Rick's flesh. Nobody but me seemed to notice.

"Did you like the covers?" said Rick. "We want to break folks in easy. The original stuff's coming up in the next set. We're thinking of adding 'Bad Moon Rising' and 'Helter Skelter' to the first bunch."

"Armageddon," said Sloan. "That's an interesting name for your group."

"Angie," said Maggie suddenly. Her fingers tightened on my wrist. "You want to come along with me to

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the ladies' room?" I could take a hint.

Rick reached out, dragged an unoccupied chair from the next table, and sat down. "We like the name. You really a minister?"

"I am," said Sloan.

"We like the name a lot." Rick's lips peeled into the same terrible smile that had displayed his teeth at the beginning of the set. "You really looking forward to the Rapture, when the sky scrolls upward like a window shade?"

"Angie?" Maggie prompted.

"I don't imagine that anticipation will be a precondition for it to happen," said Sloan.

"I can tell I'm gonna like talking to you," Rick said.

"Come on, Angie." Maggie practically dragged me to my feet. Bar johns during a break are always crowded. There were women waiting in line just to get in the door. Maggie led me past the line. A very young woman in leather started to protest. Maggie glared at her. The young woman mumbled something and turned away. Inside, there were three stalls and as many sinks. Maggie said, "We need privacy." Sometimes power infuses words. Fear can generate from that tone of words. Within a minute the restroom was empty save for us.

Maggie faced me. "You got to get out of here," she said, "you and your friend. Take him, too."

"But—"

"Just leave. Be gone before the second set ends at midnight."

"I don't understand," I said.

"You don't have to. You were always good in the old band, Angie. I always liked you. You never tried to ace me out with anyone. I don't want anything to happen to you now."

"Nothing's going to."

"It might. It will. At midnight. I'm afraid for you. Just get out." In the harsh fluorescent light, Maggie's skin looked even more dead than it had onstage. Her eyes were huge, the whites roadmapped with crimson veining.

"Not without some reason. Tell me what's happening, Maggie. Trust me. You're right. We always got along, remember?" I tried to keep my voice calm and even, conciliatory. Something was badly wrong here.

"Trust you?" Maggie smiled mirthlessly. "I don't know who to trust." Tears appeared in her eyes. "I trusted Rick."

I gathered the woman into my arms. Her lips were close to my ear. I listened to the words. "Rick made a deal. A pact. It was for us — the band, I mean. This is the start of it all, tonight. We're going to the top. It's arranged."

"I guess you're not talking about just getting a good agent," I tried to say gently. I felt her shake her head. "So what's that deal?"

"Tonight was picked deliberately. It's Halloween."

"I know," I said.

"It's the end of the year, Old Style. Before Christianity. Tomorrow's the

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beginning—" Her voice broke.

"The deal," I repeated.

Maggie choked on the words. "We get it all. But we have to offer up something tonight at midnight. A blood sacrifice."

"Animals?" I said, deliberately obtuse.

She giggled with something like hysteria. "That's what we used to call 'em in the audience, didn't we? Remember?"

"Oh," I said, letting my air out in a long breath. I breathed again slowly. "What's supposed to happen?"

"At least one...." Maggie fumbled verbally. "... person. The one we made the deal with isn't picky. Two would be better. More if we could manage. They'll be taken at midnight. That's why I don't want you here. Please, Angie. Leave."

I said nothing for a few moments. "Where?" I said.

Maggie shuddered in my arms. "He's in the dressing room." When I didn't say anything at all, Maggie said. "It's too late to back out. We've got no choice."

"We'll see." I spun her around and confronted her. "How could you do this? Any of you?"

Maggie just looked back at me mutely. I didn't need an answer. I remembered all too well what it had been like up there on the stage with the crowd out front. You never get enough.

"We're going back to Sloan and Rick," I said.

There was pleading in her words. "Don't tell Rick I told you. Please."

I touched her reassuringly on the cheek. That's all I could do. We left the women's room to the desperate file outside and returned to the table.

It was time for the second set. Rick and the others were already onstage, fine-tuning their equipment. Maggie walked past the table without looking at Sloan and joined her brother. I sat down and didn't see the nearly empty bottle I'd left. Sloan had evidently ordered me a club soda with lots of ice. I silently blessed him. At least it was cold.

" 'And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them,' " Sloan said.

I arched an eyebrow. "Revelation?"

"Ephesians 5:11. Have an interesting chat? I certainly did with Rick. The man is ... beyond certifiable."

"He probably is," I said. "And yes, it was interesting."

Sloan was too polite to ask what Maggie had wanted. I wasn't ready to tell him. First, I'd sort things out. There had to be a way to handle this. I looked around at the spectrum of people in Sawney's. Obnoxious as some of them were, I didn't feel as though I wanted any to die at midnight for the sake of the band's career. "So your talk with Rick was fascinating?"

"You could call it that." His voice hardened. "When I started to shake

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hands with Rick, something ... unusual happened."

"I noticed." Most of my soda was already gone. I chewed an ice cube.

"When I touched his hand," said Sloan, "I felt something akin to an electric charge." He hesitated. "I've thought about my interpretation." Another hesitation. "That man is infused with evil. It saturates him. It's an experience like none other I've had since I was overseas." He picked the lime wedge out of his soda and chewed reflectively on the rind. "Another thing, Angie."

After a time had passed, I prompted, "What's that?"

"He's the enemy," said Sloan, "but I find my reaction isn't simple and neat. At one time, I could have been that man. He could have been me." He smiled coldly. "I'm not especially pleased by the ambiguity." Then, "I don't know if the Lord himself could save Rick."

The second set started.

Rick had been right about the original material. The entire second set appeared to consist of a single long new song. It was called, "If I Should Wake Before I Die," and it had the same sort of tempo progression as Ravel's *Bolero*.

It began slowly, with the heavy bass beat that I unwillingly recognized was stirring sexual excitement down low in my belly. I still needed to think.

"Want to dance?" I said.

Sloan looked at me as though I had spoken Swahili. I didn't wait for protestations. I practically dragged him onto the dance floor. This was still early in the song and it was sufficiently slow that we could manage a basic two-step. I held Sloan close and felt his rigid posture yield slightly. Only slightly. Over his shoulder, I watched the moving panorama of Sawney Beane's: the bar, the band, the tables, the bar again. The crowd. Very few people seemed to have left during the break. If anything, the club was fuller, a congested phantasmagoria of men and women in bizarre costume. There was no rest at the bar itself. Kate Shiner was carrying beer and liquor cases out from the storeroom.

We orbited the dance floor as I thought again and again. *What the hell am I going to do?* Sloan and I could leave before midnight. Fine. My conscience didn't allow that. I could turn in a fire alarm and have the club evacuated before midnight. Fine. But I had an idea that the presence in the band's dressing room would probably not take that sort of thwarting lightly. And there simply was no time to use my knowledge or contacts and trundle up some kind of heavy artillery. I saw no solutions.

I realized I had twined my arms around Sloan's neck and was almost hanging on him like moss. "Sorry," I said, relaxing my hold.

He only smiled. It looked like another crack in the facade.

After a while the song was too fast

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for slow-dancing, so we returned to the table. No answers yet. I checked my watch. Midnight was too close.

"Tired?" said Sloan.

"No." I looked around Sawney's. Maybe it *was* time to bail out.

"I don't want to be a wet blanket," said Sloan, "but if you don't mind too much, we probably ought to leave soon. Ruth will be wondering how long a missionary meeting can take."

I stared at the bar. Something odd was going on. Some alarm tripped in my mind. Kate Shiner stood at the near end of the bar, staring back at me. When I met her eyes, her expression didn't change. But there was *something*. She turned back to the man talking to her. Kate was bracketed by two men, each of whom was facing her. Neither man wore a Halloween costume. The taller one was pasty-faced and had on a blue ski jacket. The shorter, darker one looked Hispanic. Each had a companionable hand on Kate's arms.

Unhurriedly, apparently supportive, they walked with her toward the long hallway that led to the office and dressing room. Kate sought my eyes again, then turned away. It all burst in my head like a star shell.

Things *could* get worse.

The news reports all week. The apprehensive talk in convenience stores and clubs. The front page of the *News* I'd looked at earlier.

"Oh, shit," I said, knocking over my chair as I got up. I could have knocked over the table and no one would have noticed. "If I Should Wake Before I Die" crashed toward its climax. I was practically oblivious to Sloan's futilely reaching for me. I saw the two men disappear with Kate into the hall and I shoved my way wildly through the crowd.

When I made it to the hall entry, I saw the three of them at the other end, Kate unlocking the office door.

"Hold it," I yelled, sprinting toward them. I don't know what I planned to do. It was all instinct.

The two men obviously hadn't anticipated being attacked by a screaming, cursing woman dressed as Vampira. I'd had to pull the dress up above my knees so I could even run, so I had my hands full. Kate started to struggle, trying to wrench free. I saw one of the men pull a knife from his pocket. Then I cannoned into them and everything started moving very fast.

There was someone behind me, someone dressed in black, and I saw his hand chop down on the knife-man's wrist. Then I was hurled back across the hall. I hit a door. The door to the dressing room.

The door started to swing open with me clinging to the outside knob. I had a quick glimpse of — nothing. Darkness pooled, clotted inside. There were no shadows. It was as though the dark were a palpable thing that simply ended at the line of demarcation that was the light in the hallway.

I started to slip and fall into the

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room, into the darkness. A hand grabbed my shoulder and yanked me out.

It was Sloan. He reeled back as one of the men swung wildly and connected with the side of his head.

"The men," I said. "They—"

"I know." Sloan slammed into the taller man's midriff and shoved him back against his partner. "God damn you," Sloan said. It wasn't profane; he meant it literally. The shorter man was off balance now. I made an instant decision about that man's life. It was no time for fine debates. I'd just have to live with it later. I looked at Kate. We both shoved him.

Against the door across the hall.

Into the dressing room.

The darkness accepted him.

Sloan hit the other man in the face. The tall man flailed backward, tripped, and fell into the dressing room.

The darkness accepted him, too.

Without even thinking, I reached part of the way into the darkness, grabbed the knob of the dressing room door, and pulled it firmly shut.

Sloan tried to get past me. "No," I said. "Not if you value your life and your soul." He looked at me uncertainly. Kate, Sloan, and I all stared at each other, hearing the horrid sounds from inside. After a while, those sounds stopped. Normal incandescent light pooled under the door. This time I didn't stop Sloan when he reached for the knob. The dressing room was just a dressing room again. No one was there. Nothing was left.

It seemed as though "If I Should Wake Before I Die" had redoubled in volume. I saw Armageddon's two roadies coming toward us, each escorting one half of an obviously drunken couple.

"Get the hell out," I screamed. "It's done!" I said other things, but they didn't stay to hear them.

We heard Armageddon segue from "If I Should Wake Before I Die" to their closing number. The verse came through clearly: "... should auld acquaintance be forgot...."

It was *Auld Lang Syne*. The New Year had begun.

Later Sloan went home to Ruth.

I simply went home.

I don't know where Kate went.

And the band? They're on their way up. Sometimes justice seems to bide its time. If it exists at all.

Since then, Sloan and I have met several times on the street. We say hello, but very little of substance. It is possible that we will again resume our conversations. I think we will talk about what happened at Sawney's on Halloween night. I believe we need to. We have to talk about the rightness or the wrongness of what we did.

From there, we can build. Or not. I don't know if Sloan considers me referred to by Ephesians.

In the meantime, Sloan still believes that rock music is a tool of the dark.

He is, of course, quite right.

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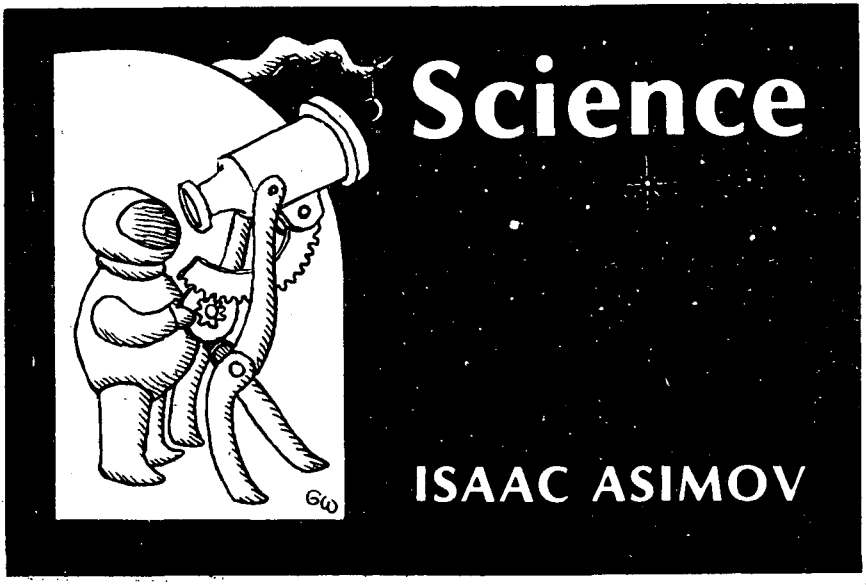

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

THE DIFFERENT YEARS OF TIME

One more story about my bypass operation and then I'll shut up about it. (Well, I *may*.)

When I found out that for a period of time I was going to be in a heart-lung machine, I worried about whether the anesthesiologist would take proper care to see that my brain, in particular, received an ample supply of oxygen. The brain consumes one-quarter of the oxygen the body uses and it seemed to me that even a temporary small shortage would damage it marginally.

I wanted *no* damage, not the most marginal. I've been making an enjoyable life out of the exceedingly sharp edge of my brain, and I didn't want it blunted.

I expressed my fears to my family internist, good old Paul, the sweetest M.D. in the world.

"Don't worry, Isaac," he said. "I'll see to it that everyone understands the situation, and I will personally test you."

And so he did. I don't remember it, but he told me what happened. Although I didn't really come to with full consciousness before 10 A.M.

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the following morning, I did stir now and then at earlier times so there were momentary fits of responsiveness followed by retreat into my anesthetized semi-coma.

At 10 P.M., some hours after the operation was completed, my eyes flickered open and Paul was standing there. "Hello, Paul," I whispered huskily (he said).

He leaned toward me, "Hello, Isaac. Make up a limerick about me."

I blinked a few times, then whispered,

"There was once an old doctor named Paul
With a penis exceedingly small—"

Whereupon Paul said, austerely, "Go no further, Isaac. You pass."

When he told me the story the next morning, I was greatly relieved, for it meant I could continue to write my monthly F&SF essays. And here goes—

You have probably encountered a number of times a little teaching device whereby you allow the history of the Earth to be compressed into a year and then mark off at what time of the year various landmark events in Earth's history took place. This gives you a more easily grasped view of the sweep of time and the relative chronological position of various bits and pieces of it.

Naturally, you find that humanity came into being very late on the last day of the year, and you get a very dramatic notion of our insignificance as an item in the chronology of the planet.

This is not a peculiarity of Earth history alone, but of every facet of every kind of history. We always see things close to us in great detail, while, as we look farther and farther away, we see matters more and more fuzzily and view it with less and less interest. Contemporary times always seem to be very long and detailed, while long-past times seem short and uninteresting.

For instance, pick up a school history of the United States that deals with the period of time from Columbus's voyage in 1492 to the present. Divide the book at the Declaration of Independence and notice how many pages are given the exploratory and colonial periods, and how many pages are given the period of the United States as an independent nation. I haven't got such a book to check, but my guess is that it would divide up into a 1 to 6 ratio.

That makes sense for a number of reasons, and I don't quarrel with it; but the average schoolchild (or adult, for that matter), leafing through

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such a book, couldn't help but get the vague notion that the strictly chronological division is similar, that the United States as an independent nation has endured for much longer than the relatively brief colonial period that preceded it.

To see what the situation really was like, let's use the trick of squeezing a period of time into an arbitrary Year, and compressing the chronology, without distortion, into the Days of that Year.

Thus, the first permanent settlement of Englishmen in what is now the territory of the United States was at Jamestown, Virginia on May 14, 1607. Call that New Year's Minute — 12:01 A.M., January 1. Call the present moment Old Year's Minute — 11:59 P.M., December 31. The time lapse from the settlement of Jamestown till now (at this time of writing) is 377 years. That means each Day of our "United States Year" is equal to 1.03 real years.

1 — The United States Year.

Jamestown settled	January 1
The landing at Plymouth Rock	January 13
The British take New Amsterdam	February 25
Philadelphia founded	March 2
Georgia (last of the 13 colonies) founded	May 3
French driven from North America	June 1
Declaration of Independence	June 14
British recognize American independence	June 21
Louisiana Purchase	July 10
Missouri Compromise	August 1
Gold discovered in California	August 22
Civil War begins	September 4
United States enters World War I	October 26
Stock market crash	November 9
Pearl Harbor	November 21
V-J day	November 25
Kennedy assassinated	December 12
Nixon resigns	December 23
United States conquers Grenada	December 31

If you study this table, it may surprise you that for nearly half the time that men of English descent were living on what is now American territory, there was no United States. It was not till very nearly the mid-

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dle of the year that the United States was legally independent by treaty with Great Britain.

The thing that *I* find most surprising, however, is that when V-J day came, it was not yet December. After all, I remember V-J day as though it were yesterday. How can a whole United States Month have passed since then. Well, it has. Almost 39 years have passed since V-J day as I write, and that is almost a fifth of the total duration of American independence.

Almost, it makes me feel old.

We can do this sort of thing on longer and longer scales. Suppose, for instance, that we begin with Columbus's landing at San Salvador on October 12, 1492.

That would cover the entire stretch of time in which North America was penetrated, explored and occupied by European powers. If we compress that into the "North America Year," we find that we cover a period equal to 492 years, so that each North America Day is 1.348 real years long.

2 — The North America Year

Columbus lands at San Salvador	January 1
Ponce de Leon discovers Florida	January 16
Cortez takes Mexico	January 20
De Soto sights the Mississippi River	February 6
Drake sails along the California coast	March 5
Jamestown founded	March 26
Declaration of Independence	July 30
Civil War begins	September 27
Pearl Harbor	November 29
Kennedy assassinated	December 15
United States conquers Grenada	December 31

Notice that during the first third of all the time that Europeans were trudging along the coast and into the interior of the North American continent, those Europeans were almost all Spanish. It wasn't till March 25 that Englishmen came to North America to stay.

And for 5/9 of the time that Europeans of any kind were in North America, there was no United States.

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There was, of course, history before the United States and even before European North America. Lots of it. Such history is usually divided into ancient times, medieval times (or the Middle Ages), and modern times. Most people, I suspect, assume that these three periods are of approximately equal duration. If anything, they might imagine that modern times is the longest of the three, because it always bulks longest in the history books.

Let's see, then — History begins with writing. Writing makes possible the recording of chronicles, the giving of names, dates, places. Without writing, we must infer matters from artifacts, and we can never determine the kind of detail that makes history what it is.

As far as we know now, the first writing was invented by the Sumerians, possibly as early as 3200 B.C. Let us, therefore begin "The History Year" with 3200 B.C. as January 1. That gives us a stretch of 5,184 years to present, so that each History Day is equal to 14.2 real years.

3 — The History Year

Writing invented	January 1
First pyramid built in Eygpt	February 1
Sargon establishes first empire in Asia	March 2
Hammurabi's law code	April 16
Egyptian Empire at its height	May 7
Trojan War	May 21
David becomes King of Israel	June 4
Homer composes *Iliad*	June 18
Rome founded	June 21
Assyrian Empire at its height	June 26
Nebuchadnezzar destroys Solomon's Temple	July 4
Cyrus founds the Persian Empire	July 7
Battle of Marathon	July 10
Athens in its Golden Age	July 13
Alexander the Great conquers Persia	July 21
Rome defeats Carthage, dominates Mediterranean	July 31
Julius Caesar assassinated	August 11
Jesus crucified	August 16
Roman Empire at maximum extent	August 22
Constantine founds Constantinople	September 6
End of west Roman Empire and of ancient times	September 16
Charlemagne crowned Emperor	October 9

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William of Normandy conquers England	October 28
Crusades begin	October 30
Magna Carta	November 7
Black Death strikes Europe	November 17
Fall of Constantinople	November 24
Discovery of America, end of medieval times	November 27
Protestant Reformation begins	November 29
English "Glorious Revolution" (1688)	December 9
Declaration of Independence	December 17
Fall of the Bastille	December 18
Human being lands on the Moon	December 31

Notice that by the time half the History Year is over, the great days of Greece have *not yet come.* We and the ancient Greeks alike are products of the second half of history.

The whole first half of the History Year is dominated by Asian kingdoms. Greece occupies the Historical Month of July, Rome that of August. The History Year is 70 percent over before "ancient times" comes to an end. In other words, ancient times (although it gets the least attention in modern books) lasts more than twice as long as medieval times and modern times together.

Whereas ancient times lasts 8.5 History Months, medieval times last just over 2 History Months, and modern times has endured just over 1 History Month.

In the History Year, I mention the English Revolution of 1688, the American Revolution of 1776, and the French Revolution of 1789. Each did its bit to establish the modern rule of liberalism and human rights. But notice that it is only in the last half of December of the History Year that this has been established and, even so, in only a small part of the world and there, precariously.

One can but sigh.

To be sure, civilization antedates writing. The word "civilization" comes from the Latin word for "citizen"; that is, "city-dweller". Let us then date civilization from the establishment of the first small cities (Jericho, for instance, in Palestine).

The beginning of civilization may be put (a bit arbitrarily) at about 8000 B.C., or 10,000 B.P. ("Before the Present"). About then, groups of people in western Asia learned to domesticate plants and animals. They

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turned from food gathering to agriculture and herding. This made larger concentrations of people possible in a given area and led inevitably to the founding of cities.

If we start "the Civilization Year" at 8000 B.C., this gives us a duration of 9,984 years and makes each Civilization Day 27.35 real years long.

4 — The Civilization Year

Earliest cities founded	January 1
Earliest pottery we know of	February 6
Agriculture reaches southeastern Europe	March 14
Agriculture in the Nile Valley	April 20
Beginning of the use of metals	May 8
Traditional date of Biblical creation	May 26
Invention of writing	June 25
Beginning of the Bronze Age	July 2
The Great Pyramid built	July 20
Iron Age begins	September 12
Solomon builds the Temple at Jerusalem	September 25
Jesus is crucified	October 21
End of ancient times	November 6
End of medieval times	December 13
Declaration of Independence	December 23
Assassination of Kennedy	December 31, 6 A.M.

The traditional date of Biblical creation referred to in the Civilization Year is 4004 B.C., as determined by Archbishop Ussher and as still given in most editions of the King James Bible. By that time, however, civilization had endured for 2/5 of its total span.

Half the period of civilization had passed before the Great Pyramid was constructed. We think of the stretch of time from our lifetime to the pyramids as enormous, but before that there stretched a period of pyramid-less civilization just as long. It was not only pyramid-less, but was totally illiterate.

To be sure, this first half of civilization, without writing or pyramids, was crude and rudimentary by our standards and existed only over a small patch of the world, but we must not sneer at it. We are what we are today because we built on the achievements of those illiterates. An impartial assessment of what they did might lead to the conclusion that

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it was they who had the harder task than we, and who accomplished more on the basis of what they had to work with.

In fact, even before there were cities and agriculture, human beings made great advances and, notably showed that they were great artists and ingenious hunters and tool-makers. *Homo sapiens sapiens* ("modern man"), throughout his/her existence, demonstrated great ingenuity and adaptability, and it is highly arbitrary to define civilization in terms of one particular advance such as city-building. The history of "modern man" is one of steady advance.

What about "the Human Year," then. Suppose we start it at 35,000 B.C. (37,000 B.P.), by which time "modern man" was the only hominid living on Earth — though only on the continents of Africa and Eurasia. The total duration of 36,984 years means that each Human Day is 101.3 real years.

5 — The Human Year

Homo sapiens sapiens begins domination of Earth	January 1
Beginnings of representational art	April 9
Human beings migrate into Australia and America	May 28
Cave paintings at their height	August 10
Human beings complete settlement of Americas	September 14
Civilization begins	September 24
Great Pyramid built	November 17
End of ancient times	December 16
End of medieval times	December 26
Declaration of Independence	December 29
Pearl Harbor	December 31, 10 A.M.

More than half the stretch of the Human Year elapsed before the time of the great cave paintings came, and nearly three-quarters of the stretch elapsed before what we call civilization began. Only the last quarter of the history of "modern man" showed any civilization anywhere.

The United States has existed only for two Human Days.

There were, of course, hominids before modern man. For that matter, there was *Homo sapiens* before modern man. The so-called "Neanderthal men" (*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*) were the same species as us, and could (and presumably did) interbreed with our ancestors. Their genes must still exist among us.

And before the Neanderthals, there were other, smaller, lesser-

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brained species of the genus *Homo,* and before that there were creatures with still lesser brains, who were not *Homo* but who were still hominids, and who walked upright, had hands like ours, and were, in general, closer to us in anatomic detail than they were to the apes.

The first hominids we can be sure of were "australopithecines," living in southern and eastern Africa, no larger than children of our own species, but walking upright as we do and having their hands free to explore and manipulate the Universe.

They may have made their appearance about 4,000,000 years ago, and while there is talk of still earlier hominids, I will start "the Hominid Year" at 4,000,000 B.P. This would mean that each "Hominid Day" would be 10,960 real years in length.

6 — The Hominid Year

Australopithecines appear	January 1
Genus Homo (*Homo habilis*) appears	July 2
Homo erectus (Peking man) appears	August 15
Fire comes into use	November 15
Homo sapiens (Neanderthal man) appears	December 18
"Modern man" appears	December 26
"Modern man" only hominid on Earth	December 28
Civilization begins	December 31, 2 A.M.
History begins	December 31, noon

During the first half of the Hominid Year, australopithecines were the only hominids to exist. It was only after 95 percent of the Hominid Year had passed, that *Homo sapiens* made its appearance. "Modern man" is a creature of the last Week only, and all of civilization is crowded into the last Day.

Incidentally, for seven-eighths of the time during which hominids existed on Earth, they did so without the use of fire. The development of that use was the greatest achievement of pre-sapiens days. The achievement was that of *Homo erectus,* for the remains of campfires were found in the caves that housed the bones of Peking man.

Hominids are not the only organisms that left fossil remains through which we can trace paleontological history. Before the hominids were earlier primates, and other mammals before them, and non-mammals, and invertabrates. A rich fossil record stretches back for about 600,000,000 years.

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Let us then set up "the Fossil Year" and begin it at 600,000,000 B.P. Each Fossil Day would thus be 1,644,000 real years long.

7 — The Fossil Year

Fossils appear; all invertebrate	January 1
First vertebrates appear	March 1
First land plants appear	April 12
First air-breathing fish appear	April 30
First forests appear	May 4
First land-vertebrates (Amphibia) appear	May 12
First reptiles appear	July 1
First dinosaurs appear	August 30
First mammals appear	September 5
First birds appear	September 29
Flowering plants appear	October 30
Extinction of the dinosaurs	November 21
Large mammals dominate Earth	November 28
First hominids appear	December 27
Fire comes into use	December 31, 4 P.M.
Neanderthal man appears	December 31, 10 P.M.
"Modern man" appears	December 31, 11:15
Civilization begins	December 31, 11:50

As you can see, for the first quarter of the Fossil Year, no land life existed, and there were no land vertebrates till three-eighths of the Fossil Year had elapsed.

The reptiles appeared only when the Fossil Year was half over, and the dinosaurs dominated the Fossil Fall. The hominids are creatures of the last four Fossil Days, modern man of the last 45 Fossil Minutes and all of history is crowded into the last 10 Fossil Minutes.

But there was life before the fossils. The only reason fossils appeared so suddenly 600,000,000 years ago, is that there was a preceding evolutionary efflorescence that produced shells and other hard parts of increasingly complex organisms, and it was these parts that fossilized easily.

Before those complex animals there were small, soft-bodied organisms that did not fossilize well, and before them microscopic organisms that could leave only the barest traces.

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These traces have been found, however, and paleontologists have traced life far back to near the beginning of Earth's existence. We will therefore set up "the Earth Year," and start it 4,600,000,000 years ago at which time Earth had first assumed more or less its present form (as did the Sun, and the Solar system generally). Each Earth Day is therefore 12,600,000 real years long.

8 — The Earth Year

Earth assumes its present form	January 1
Primitive bacteria develop	April 1
Photosynthesis begins in blue-green algae	May 21
Multicellular organisms develop with simple cells	July 24
Cells with nuclei (eukaryotes) develop	October 11
True animals develop	October 27
Rich fossil record begins	November 12
Land-life (plants) appear	November 26
First dinosaurs appear	December 14
Extinction of dinosaurs	December 26
First hominids appear	December 31, 4:30 P.M.

You see, then, that if we take the Earth as a whole, it passed perhaps a quarter of its lifetime as a lifeless globe. During nine-tenths of its lifetime, the *land* remained lifeless. It is a testimony to the difficulty of dry land as a vehicle for life, that land life is a product of only the last Earth Month.

The dinosaurs are creatures of Earth mid-December only, and the entire stretch of hominid existence is a matter of only the last 7 1/2 Earth Hours. Modern man has been on earth only for the last 5 3/4 Earth Minutes, and history is a matter of only the last 35 Earth Seconds or so.

And although this essay has now come to the close of its allotted space, we are not finished. I'll carry on next month with still vaster sweeps of time.

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Bruce Sterling writes, "Robert Silverberg has picked up 'Swarm' (F&SF, April 1982) for SFWA's Nebula anthology this year." Here, however, Sterling presents us with a story of a very different sort which he describes as "an eighteenth-century scientific romance, with hallucinations." "Telliamed" is a rather special story; one you should find quite up to snuff...

Telliamed

BY
BRUCE STERLING

Monsieur Benoit de Maillet, formerly His Majesty's grand consul in Eygpt, not retired, tottered down the slope of the beach on the arm of his manservant. Torquetil. When they reached the usual spot beside the great striped rock, de Maillet leaned on his cane, breathing heavily. The walk was a hard one for a man in his eighties. De Maillet's wig was askew and his wise old face was pinched with concealed suffering.

Torquetil unfolded the campstool. De Maillet sat on it with a brief sigh of relief. Torquetil set up the parasol. It was an immense and gaudy parting gift from the Sultan of Egypt, and de Maillet was particularly proud of it. The servant set a wicker basket of provisions by the old philosopher's swollen knees. "Will there be anything else, monsieur?"

"When you get back, have the carriage master come and examine those straps," de Maillet said firmly. He opened his wicker box and pulled out a black-ribboned pair of spectacles. He sat upright again with an effort and put his hand to the side of his substantial paunch. "And tell the cook —no more curries!"

"Very well, monsieur." The young Breton bounded back up the slope toward the carriage.

De Maillet balanced the spectacles on his large and fleshy nose. He reached into the basket for a letter, and broke its wax seal with his thumb.

Pont Gardeau, Suriname
February 12, 1737

To the Sieur Benoit de Malliet,
Grand Consul and Envoy
Plenipotentiary, ret'd.,
in Marseille.

Cher Monsieur:

Please forgive this execrable hand-

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writing, which, I know, is almost as bad as your own. It seems that my secretary has fallen ill with one of the manifold agues of this pestilential region. Without the aid of this invaluable boy my studies of natural theology have fallen into a lamentable state. I myself am not so well as I should be; but it is nothing serious. I imagine that neither of us can claim the vigor we had in those faraway days in Egypt.

I regret that I am unable to send you the samples of rock you requested; during the past several months I have been upriver, in the interior, humbly struggling for the propagation of His Catholic Majesty's most perfect Faith. During such time I collected a number of very curious worms and insects, with which I hope to confound the pedantic System of the infidel Linnaeus.

The natives of the interior are stubbornly set in their heathen errors, yet full of remarkable stories of men with tails, ancestral giants, and the like, which I hope to convey to you, when I have more thoroughly mastered their language.

And now I must chide you. A friend of mine in the Royal Society of London, a colleague in natural theology (though very lamentably a Protestant), has told me that he has read a certain manuscript circulated secretly among the savants of France and England, which he called *Telliamed*, or *Discourses On the Diminution of the Sea*. He was full of praise for this manuscript, which, he being an infidel, does nothing for the sanctity of your reputation. And you need not protest your innocence; for a child could see that the supposed Indian sage, named *Telliamed*, who narrates this new System of Geology, merely has your own name spelled backward.

Perhaps the sea really has diminished; I should find this hard to deny, since I, too, have seen the desert of petrified ships in the Bahar-Balaama west of Cairo. But this should not be interpreted to go against Revelation. As your spiritual adviser, I must warn you, my old friend: you are no longer so young as to be able to neglect the very pressing matter of the salvation of your soul. In the end the Dogma must triumph, and no amount of sophistical "evidences," "hypotheses," or "deductions" will save you when you argue before the Throne of Judgment.

I should hate to think that the collections of rocks and fossils that I have sent you had been used for an impious purpose. Yet I cannot leave you without a gift of some sort; and knowing your fondness for snuff, I have sent you some of the aboriginals' own nasal aliment, which they derive from a number of curious bushes and vines. It is not tobacco, but upon the use of it, they receive the word of the Faith more readily, with excitement and rejoicing; so I cannot think that it is bad. I include the small birdbone snuffing tool with which they inhale the substance, for your collection.

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In return, I ask that you burn a few candles for the repose of the soul of poor Berard Procureur; and please try to go to confession with regularity. I pray for you,

Your ancient friend,

Fr. GERARD LE BOVIER de FUILLET, S.J.

De Maillet smiled. "It is not at all a bad thing to have one's spiritual adviser in another country," he mused aloud. He pulled from within the heavy envelope another, smaller envelope, which rustled. He peeled the gummed endpaper loose, and the snuff within the packet released a pleasant, faintly bitter aroma of exotic spices.

The smell unlocked a chain of memories within de Maillet's mind: cones of black incense smouldering in a perforated silver bowl, dark coffee in a china cup, the nude rump of an Egyptian courtesan spread across a brocade pillow. With these unexpected and pleasant memories came a sudden comfortable loosening in de Maillet's bowels. He felt a brief sense of animal well-being, a warm flickering from the ashen coals of youth.

His doctor had forbidden him snuff. It had been several months since he had last felt his nostrils solidly plugged. He peered carefully into the paper packet. The fine-ground leaves looked harmless enough. He fingered the light, hollow birdbone, then plunged it into the packet and snorted recklessly.

"Yoww!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. His spectacles flew off into the sand. Cursing, de Maillet stomped heavily around the pole of the parasol, his old eyes leaking tears. The pagan snuff had stung his tissues like an angry wasp, hurting so much that he could not even sneeze. He clutched his cheekbone and sinus with one age-spotted, leathery hand.

Slowly the pain faded to a strange numbness, not entirely unpleasant. De Maillet straightened his back, then bent to pick up his silver-headed cane and his spectacles. It had been a long time since he had bent so easily. He sat on the campstool without puffing for breath.

He noted with interest that his sensibilities seemed heightened. When he felt the smooth ebony of his cane, it was as if he had never felt it before. Even his eyesight seemed improved; the blue summer sky over the crystalline Mediterranean seemed to shimmer as if it had just been created. Even the sand grains on his silver-buckled pumps seemed to have been placed each just so, forming a tiny constellation of their own against the black leather.

He was just contemplating filling his other nostril when he saw a young townsman running toward him from a rockier section of the coast. Here there were a number of secluded dells and hollows where the young gallants of Marseille were wont to take their mistresses, or other young women whom they wished to persuade to assume that

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estate. The stranger was a handsome fellow of commercial class with a face slightly marred by smallpox.

"Did you hear a cry for help?" the young man demanded, stopping in the broad shadow of de Maillet's parasol.

"My word," said de Maillet, embarrassed. "I'm afraid that I myself cried out. I, er, am somewhat troubled with the gout. I wasn't aware that there was anyone within earshot."

"It can't have been you, monsieur," the young man said reasonably, tucking in his linen shirttail. "It was followed by a spate of the most horrible cursing, some of it in a foreign language. My companion was so frightened that she fled immediately."

"Oh," de Maillet said. Suddenly he smiled. "Well, perhaps there was a boatload of sailors, then. My eyes are not so good as they were. I might have missed them completely."

The young man grinned. "All is well. Women always want to prolong a rendezvous long after its natural summation." His eyes fell on de Maillet's cane, a presentation item from the city fathers of Marseille. "Forgive me," the young man said. "You are the Sieur de Maillet, the famous savant, are you not?"

De Maillet smiled. "You know I am. You just read my name from the cane."

"Nonsense," said the young tradesman vigorously. "Everyone knows who Monsieur de Maillet is. Marseille owes its prosperity to you. My father is Jean Martine of the Martine Oriental Import-Export Company. I am his eldest son, Jean Martine the Younger." He bowed. "He has spoken of you often. My family owes you a very large debt of gratitude."

"Yes, I believe I know your father," de Maillet said generously. He loved flattery. "He deals in Egyptain tradestuffs, does he not? Bitumen, antiquities, and the like." De Maillet shrugged with an aristocrat's proper vagueness about such matters.

"The very same," said Martine. "We have sometimes had the honor of supplying Your Excellency with curios for your very famous cabinet of natural wonders." He hesitated. "Without meaning to intrude, Your Excellency, I cannot help but wonder why I find you alone here on this deserted beach."

De Maillet looked at the tradesman's open, guileless face and felt the natural urge of the old, the learned, and the garrulous to instruct the young. "It has to do with my System," he said. "My life's work in natural philosophy, upon which my posthumous fame will rest. For many years, in my travels, I have examined seashores, and studied the history of the world as revealed in its rocks. It is my contention that the level of the sea is dropping, at a rate I calculate at perhaps three feet every thousand years. During my life I have amassed evidence of this diminution, and I believe it to be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt."

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"Very remarkable," said Martine slowly. "But surely you are not sitting here in order to watch it drop."

"No," said de Maillet, "but when the weather is fine, I often come here, to think over old times, to examine my notes and journals, and to extend my chain of deductions.

"For instance. If you grant that the sea is diminishing, then it follows quite rigorously that there must have been a time, many thousands of centuries ago, when the entire earth was covered by the sea. And you may prove this quite easily. I have examined the cabinet of Herr Scheuchzer in Zurich, which contains a great many fossilized fish that that worthy man pried from the stones of the Swiss mountains. In the writings of the savant Fulgose we find the story of an entire ship, with its sails, cordage, and anchors, and the bones of forty of its crew, found fossilized a hundred fathoms down an iron mine in the Canton of Bern. Herodotus writes of iron mooring-rings found far up the slopes of the mountains of Mokatan, near Memphis. How else can we account for these vestiges, than to assume that the sea was once deep enough to drown these mountains?"

De Maillet jabbed his cane into the sand. "So. It follows, then, that life must have arisen from the sea, and that such creatures as sea adders, sea apes, sea dogs, and sea lions must have swarmed in the depths when there was no land at all. Similarly, sea grapes, sea lettuce, sea moss, and sea trees must have supplied the land with its greenery. The seeds of all creation are present in the ether, as has been proved by the microscopes of the Dutch savants."

"This is very troubling," the young man said. "What of me, then? Do you believe that men, too, arose from the sea?"

"To be sure, it is troubling," de Maillet said. " But the *evidence*, young man; one cannot ignore the *evidence*. I admit that I have never seen mermen. But I have seen the bones of giants. Thirty years ago, in the quarry of Cape Coronne, just a few miles from here, I saw the bones of a giant, lying on his back, enclosed in the stone. When you have seen a marvel like that with your own eyes, you may confidently put aside your doubts...." A strange feeling was creeping up and down the length of de Malliet's spine. He closed his eyes and felt a weird tremor below the soles of his feet, as if the bowels of the earth had shifted. When he opened his eyes, with a crawling sense of vertigo, he saw a phenomenon so odd that he rejected it almost at once as a trick of the light.

It was as if the hand of God had dropped a formless pane of tinted glass on the horizon. Then this mighty pane, or this wall of invisible essence, had swept forward from out of the distance and flashed past him. It was as if this formless wall had combed the sea to its depths, and had passed through the very substance of the earth, leaving no

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ripple of its passage, yet leaving everything somehow subtly changed. He himself felt different, stirred somehow, with an odd tingling sensation, as he sometimes had before a thunderstorm. A strange cool breeze began to blow steadily off the sea. It seemed to de Maillet that the suspicious breeze had a faint marshy reek of roiled mud, from the subaqueous depths of the world.

He looked at the young man sitting in the sand at his feet. Some manner of subtle transformation had affected the young tradesman. He was eyeing de Maillet with a bold and speculative look, as if he were about to buy the world and was ready to offer de Maillet as a down payment. De Maillet said faintly, "You didn't see...?"

"See what, Your Excellency?"

"A certain ... flash, a certain wind? No? No, of course not." De Maillet shivered. "Where were we?"

"Your Excellency was speaking of mermen."

"Mermen." Although it was one of his favorite topics, the word sounded strange to de Maillet, as if in a single instant the word had aged a thousand years and was now some dusty and totally discredited apparition from the remote past. Had he ever really believed in mermen and merwomen? Surely he must have, for they merited an entire subchapter in his masterwork.

"Ah yes, mermen. Though I have never seen one, I have garnered many references from writers of unquestioned veracity. We must omit the tales of ancients such as Pliny, who speaks of flute-playing tritons and the like; they were entirely too credulous.

"Avoiding old-wives' tales, then, and sticking strictly to the facts: I have read the works of al-Qaswini, the celebrated Arabian writer, in the original. In his narrative of the travels of Salim, envoy of the Caliph Vathek of the Abassids, he mentions a fishing party on the Caspian Sea, where a mergirl was rescued whole from the belly of a monstrous fish. She was not half-fish and half-woman, as popular error has it, but a woman entire. On being parted from the water, she sobbed and tore her hair, but could not speak any human words. This was in the year of the Hegira 288, or the year 842 of our era.

"In the year 1430, after a great flood in the Zuider Zee, a mergirl was captured from the mud behind the dikes. The good women of Edam taught her to dress herself, to spin, and to make the sign of the cross, which, one must suppose, was the entirety of the accomplishments of the women of that rather dull country.... In later life she attempted to return to the water on a number of occasions, but her lungs had accustomed themselves to the breathing of air, and she was not able to do it. Such was no doubt the case with our remotest ancestors, who, emerging from the sea onto the first uncovered islands, found after a certain time that they could not return. I

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imagine that this process happens even today. I have read accounts of savage men, the orangoutans of the Dutch East Indies, who are covered with hair and cannot speak human language. Obviously they are not far removed from their merhood.

"From time to time tailed men are found among the European races. A courtesan I knew in Pisa told me of a lover of hers whose body hair was black and thick, whose strength was that of several men, and who had a tail. Doubtless a race of tailed mermen exists somewhere in the sea's unplumbed depths. New species of all kinds must creep from the sea at one time or another; how else are we to account for the flora and fauna of remote islands? No one has ever seen such an emergence. But how many have watched the shoreline patiently, for years on end, knowing for what to look?"

"I suppose that no one but Your Excellency could be so qualified," Martine said. "Is this, then, the reason for your vigil? You expect some prodigy to emerge from the sea?"

De Maillet smiled sadly. "No, of course not. The chances are infinitesimal that I could actually witness such a thing. But what else am I to do? My legs are too weak and gouty for me to leap about in cliffs and quarries, as I did in my youth. All I have now are my eyes and my brain. Even if a merman were to emerge at this moment, I would not be able to capture or subdue him. But if I saw him, I would be sure of my System — surer even than I am now, after amassing evidence for years. I could die knowing that History is sure to vindicate me."

He looked out wistfully across the waters. "Suppose that, at this moment, one were to see a strange movement among those waves that roll and pitch so oddly in this wind. Suppose one were to see that patch of sea-foam begin to eddy and twist — yes, just as it is doing now, only faster. Faster, becoming unmistakable!" De Maillet heaved himself to his feet and pointed with his cane. "My God, look!"

The young man stared out to sea. "I see nothing...."

"Use your eyes, fool! Do you not see where that whirlpool gyres and spreads? Its rim glitters with foam like diamonds, and its waters are the green of ... of ancient bronze, or Chinese jade, or the sheen of an insect in amber, or ... or...." The words ground to a mumble in the sudden torrent of images. De Maillet pointed dumbly with his cane. The young man looked at de Malliet, then back at the sea, then at de Malliet again. Suddenly he turned and ran off headlong down the beach.

De Maillet ignored the fleeing youth and took two tottering steps closer to the apparition. About the whirlpool's foamy edges, half-translucent phantoms were chasing one another in the wind, streaking around and around the whirlpool's center in a riot of films and veils. Some of the

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phantoms embraced one another; other, darker spirits moved sluggishly, as if poisoned by earthly biles; yet others, with streaming hair and rolling eyes, blew curling gasps of wind from their mouths. Their looks and movements proclaimed them senseless things, mere servants and harbingers of the prodigy that was to come.

More and more of the aerial spirits were cast off from the frantic whirling of the jade-green maelstrom; mere blobs of foam at first, they took on form in their flight and spiraled upward, forming before de Maillet's amazed eyes a slowly whirling tower of unearthly presences. Above them, a surf of clouds boiled out across the empty, crawling sky.

A shaft of muddy green light sprang upward from the maelstrom's depth, and another presence, a greater one by far, began to emerge from the whirlpool's core. She rose with slow majesty from the bottom of the sea, whirling like a dervish entranced: a Dark Girl, whose skin was the color of slate and whose black, slimy hair had the damp, clinging look of kelp or sea moss. She was nude, her secrets parts concealed by her hand across her breast and the curling of a mass of hair across her hip. As her knees and ankles rose above the water's rim, the whirlpool slowed and vanished, showing her bare feet perched within the mother-of-pearl bowl of an enormous clamshell.

Awed by the majesty of this dark giantess, de Maillet fell painfully to one knee. The Dark Girl's eyes opened; they were the color of the whirlpool's waters, a dark, archaic green.

Two of the wind-spirits offered the Dark Girl a long cloak or veil, made of their own intangible essence. As it touched her dark shoulders, it at once assumed weight and substance, and became a miraculous cloak, arcanely worked with embroidered symbols of manticores, rocs, krakens, one-eyed giants, and other monstrous beasts and prodigies.

The Dark Girl's curving lips opened slightly. "Greetings, philosopher."

Hearing that she knew of him, de Maillet's amazement was quelled, and his old, stubborn courage at once filled his ancient heart. He heaved himself to his feet with the help of his cane and bent forward in a stiff and courtly bow. "A very good day to Your Ladyship," he said.

The Dark Girl smiled the strange, hieratic smile seen on the oldest statues of Greece and Egypt. "You know my name?"

"I know that you are the Dark Girl from the Sea; surely that should be title enough, since there could never be two such entities."

"Ah," she said, "old philosopher, you have lost none of your cleverness. It is well that you flatter me now, after having done me so many grievous injuries during your long career. We are old enemies, you and I. You have faced me many times, and stolen your

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knowledge from my dark realm. You built your System to do me hurt. But now you face me incarnate." The Dark Girl's great eyelids closed and opened, and she fixed him with her gaze of serpent green.

"Listen, philosopher!" she cried. "This is a Day of days, when a Great Tide of Change sweeps across the World, and the Spirit of the Age — which is to say, the minds of men — is transformed forever. During this awe-filled Moment, the iron laws of necessity and fate that govern this world are held in abeyance, and the dark essences and spirits that ruled this plane of being may walk abroad for the last time."

De Maillet said, "I have read that in a man's last days he may glimpse hidden truths and have prophetic visions. Am I dying, then?"

"O mortal, the whole world is dying, and a new world is being born: a world that you yourself, and the others of your kind, have brought into being. It will be a barer, sharper world, where a harsh and pitiless Enlightenment burns from men's minds the old, warm clutter of legends and dogmas and romances."

"But my System," de Maillet cried. "In this new world of clarity and light, will my System be triumphant? Will my name live on? Will evidence support me?"

The Dark Girl laughed aloud, revealing a gray mouthful of sharp, serrated teeth. "You ask me to prophesy? I am the Mother of Fantasies, the Mother of Faith, Hope, and the Church."

De Maillet stared, clutching his ebony cane to his chest. "You are Ignorance."

"I am," the Dark Girl said. "So ask of me no favors, you who have pursued and harried me throughout this world; you, who through your learned books and the example of your life, shall harry me still, even after your death. Ask questions of my daughters, if ask you must."

The Dark Girl gestured with her slate-gray hand, and three Weird Sisters sprang up from the sand at de Maillet's feet.

"I am Faith," said the first of the sisters. "I am she who enters the mind of man when his power to reason is exhausted, and he clings stubbornly to his own wishes and ambitions, and believes in them, for fear of madness otherwise. You have chased me from your own mind and, with your books, sometimes from the minds of others; but I will persist as long as there is ignorance and fear."

"Why do you cringe, then?" said de Maillet. "And why is your face so pale?"

"O savant, you have wounded me. In the new age that dawns, it will be possible to live without me, as you have lived. You and your brethren, with eyes that see everything and fear nothing, will make me a thing of catalogs and dissertations and claw me with harsh arguments and skeptical

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logics. That is why I tremble and cannot meet your eyes."

"What of my System, then, Spirit? Will it be revealed as truth?"

"You must believe that it will," said Faith, and seeped away into the sand.

The second Sister stepped before him. "I am Hope," she said accusingly, "and I, too, shall be wounded grievously. I shall no longer be the great, blind Hope of Salvation, but only trivial fragments of hope: for power, or riches, or earthly glory, or simply for an end to pain. This era to come will not be a time of great hopes, but of plans, predictions, theories, and hypotheses, when Man will seize the reins of fate in his own hands, and have only himself to blame or credit. I shall not be totally destroyed; but you shall rob me of my glory."

"What of my System, then, Spirit? You whose eyes are fixed always on the future? Will my work persist?"

"You must hope that it will," she said, and vanished into the sand.

De Maillet faced the specter of the Church. "You should have been mine!" said the last of the Sisters, pointing at him with a bony arm lopped off clean at the wrist. Within her hooded veil, the crone's eyes were tightly shut. "If not one of my theologians, then mine to burn!"

"I never opposed you," said de Maillet. "Not openly."

"But your logics have chopped off my hands!" the Spirit wailed. "In the Days to come, your successors will cry, 'Crush the infamous thing!', and make of me a mockery, a thing to be shunned by freethinking men.

"Your heart was not mine, philosopher. It belonged to science and to worldly fame. Each time you despised and doubted the flames of hell, those flames guttered a little lower. As you have discovered His worldly machineries, you have withered the God of the Prophets to a watchmaker's God, a phantom mechanic. The demons that lurked in the wastes; the spirits of woods and dells; the legions of ghost and angels, all, all will shrivel in the pitiless light!

"No more will I gather the souls of believers for rapture and punishment. When the great Change is through, there will be no souls. Men will stand revealed as cunning animals, born from the loins of apes. Their sharpened minds will cut all my fine fictions into pieces." Weeping, the Church turned her back on the philosopher.

De Maillet leaned on his cane. "You should not have concealed the truth," he said.

"The Truth!" cried Ignorance. "O mortal, the truth exists in the minds of men. It is you who have brought this great Change upon the World. The round and cozy Firmament was too small for your ambitions. No, you would have stars in Newton's orbits, and whole Universes reeling to your laws! Every law and datum wrenched from the great Mystery enfeebles God, to put Man in His place! I see my fate

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is written on your brow. The day will come, in stark futurity, when the mind of Man will encompass all, and his omniscience will utterly destroy me. So know my hatred!"

From the depths of the sea, a wall of turgid water roared upon the land and struck de Maillet down. His stick was knocked from his grasp and his nostrils were filled with the smell of muck. As he floundered in the dark water, blinded, he seized a smooth and rounded pebble from the beach. He lurched splashing to his feet.

His spectacles were gone. He looked around wildly for the apparition of the Dark Girl. "This!" he shouted, shaking the pebble in his clenched fist. "This will defeat you, Dark Spirit! This is the *evidence;* I put my Faith and Hope in that, and in myself...."

A dull roaring came from out to sea. Dimly, de Maillet saw the waves receding, and a vast wall surging toward the land, bright with lightnings. The storm burst upon him with appalling speed, crackling, rumbling, and roaring, with a sound like the walls of Heaven itself, crumbling under seige.

Gasping, stumbling, clutching his pebble to his pounding heart, Benoit de Maillet fled into the ultimate darkness.

A pure and searing light beat down on the old man's eyelids. Groaning, de Maillet opened his eyes upon a brilliant summer dawn.

Suddenly the face of his servant Torquetil was thrust before his own. De Maillet seized the shoulder of the young man's livery coat. "Torquetil!"

"Huzza!" cried Torquetil, pulling loose and leaping into the air in joy. "He stirs, he lives! My master speaks to me!"

A hoarse, ragged cheer broke out. De Maillet, dizzily, sat up. A motley collection of house servants, fisherfolk, and townsmen had gathered around him, some of them clutching burned-out torches. "We have searched for you all night," said Torquetil. "I brought the carriage as soon as the weather turned bad, but you had gone!"

"Help me up," de Maillet said. The young Breton put his shoulder under de Maillet's arm and hoisted him to his feet. "Monsieur's clothes are drenched," Torquetil said.

Blinking myopically, de Maillet stared at the pebble he held in his hand.

"It was the young gentleman here who first thought of looking among the Lovers' Rocks," said Torquetil, gestering politely at the confident, well-dressed figure of Jean Martine the Younger.

"It was nothing," the young merchant said, stepping closer. "After we, ah, parted, I felt some concern for Your Excellency. The weather turned foul quite suddenly, and I thought Your Excellency might have sought shelter here." He smiled patronizingly at de Maillet, obviously pleased at his

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own ingenuity in tracking down an eccentric dotard. "The rocks were very high; in the wind and darkness my servants lost their way. I do hope Your Excellency is not injured."

"I've lost my spectacles," de Maillet said. "Torquetil, do you have my spare ones?"

"Of course, monsieur." He produced them. De Maillet hurriedly pinched them on and studied the wave-smoothed pebble. "Remarkable," he said. "Remarkable! Have I played by the shore of this great ocean so long, to have no more than this? Still, I have this. I do. This, at least, is mine."

Torquetil glanced pleadingly at Jean Martine; the merchant stifled a smile. "We must get Your Excellency into some dry clothes," he said. "My carriage is on the road, not far from here. It is at your service."

"Come along, monsieur," said Torquetil with exaggerated gentleness. He lowered his voice. "It is not well that the common folk should see you like this."

There was a sudden bustle at the back of the small crowd and three ragged children burst forth. "We found it, we found it!" they cried. One of them carried de Maillet's ebony cane.

"Splendid!" de Maillet said. "Give them a little something, Torquetil." The servant tossed them a few coppers; they scrambled for them wildly. "And what about my parasol?" de Maillet said.

Torquetil looked sad. "Alas, monsieur, your wonderful parasol, so strange and colorful! The winds, the terrible winds have blown it all to pieces; it is all cast down and wrecked."

"I see," de Maillet said. He was silent for a moment, then heaved a heavy sigh.

Martine cleared his throat. "If Your Excellency should care to visit my father's warehouse in town, perhaps we could find you another."

"Never mind," de Maillet said stoically. He polished the pebble across the front of his soggy waistcoat and dropped it into his pocket. Seeing him do this, the children pointed at him and giggled behind their hands.

"They laugh," de Maillet observed. "Posterity will laugh. Thus am I answered." He leaned heavily on his cane, then turned to go. Torquetil helped him up the slope.

Suddenly de Maillet stopped and squared his shoulders. "And what if they do?" he demanded. "At least, if they laugh at you, then you know you are still alive! Eh, Torquetil?"

Torquetil smiled. "Just as you say, monsieur." He brushed sand from his master's shoulders. "Let us go home. The cook has promised: no more curries."

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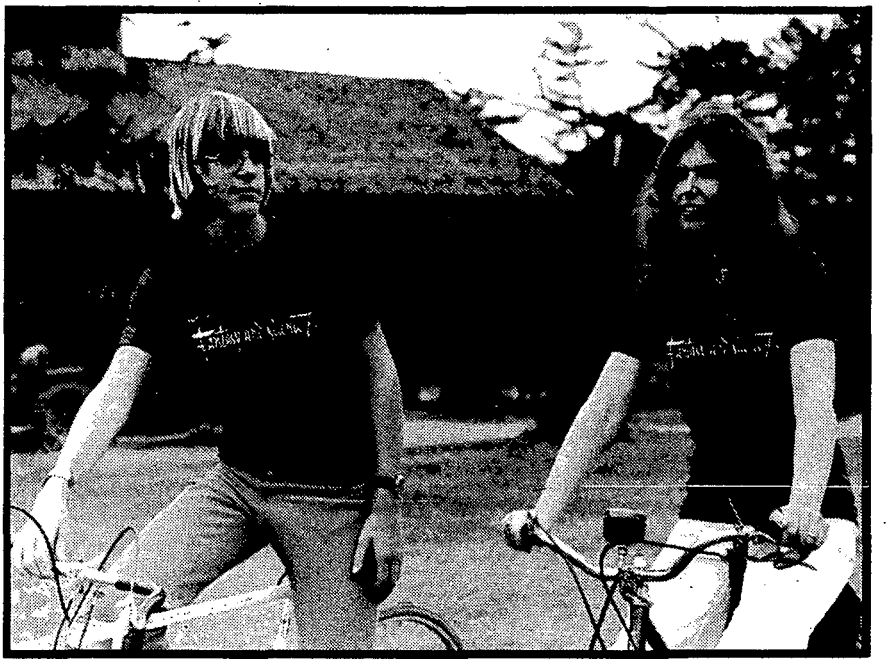

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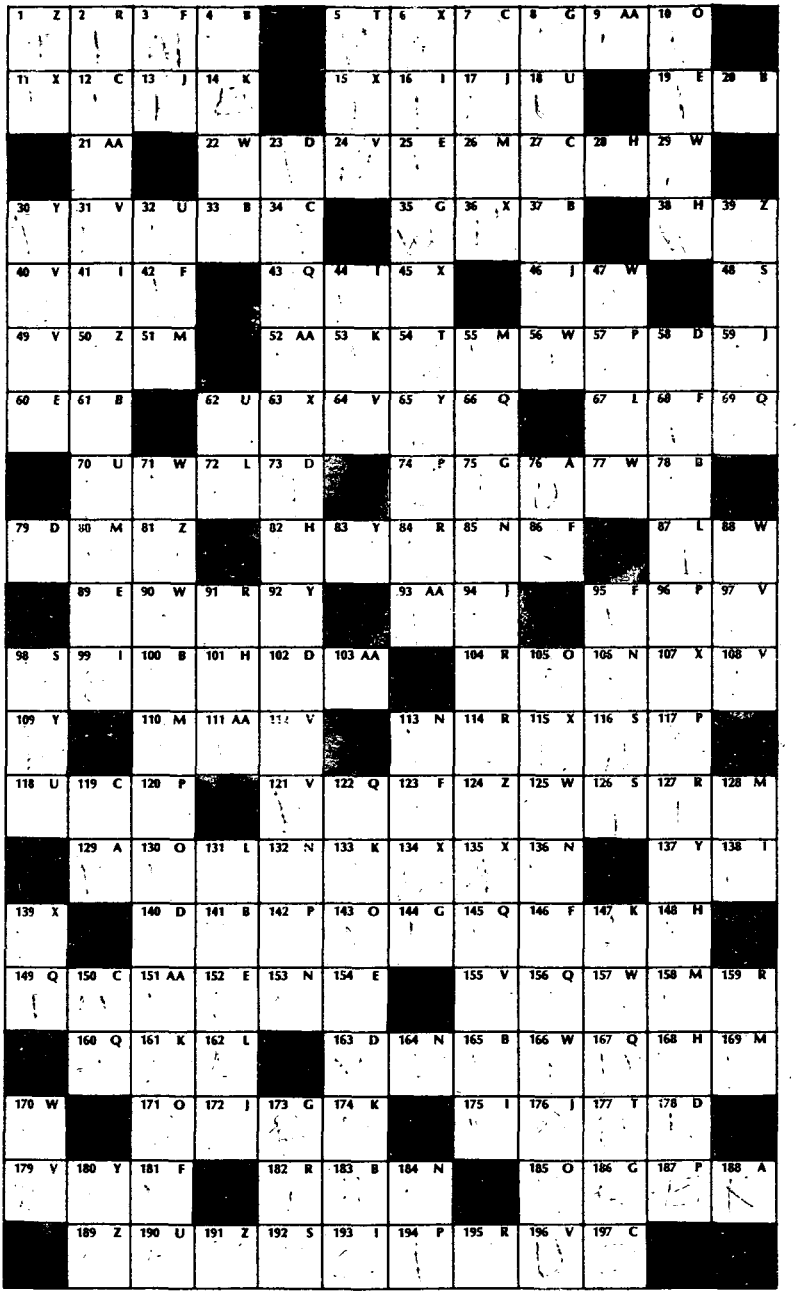

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Acrostic Puzzle

by Ronald Miller

This puzzle contains a quotation from a science fiction story. First, guess the clues and write the words in the numbered blanks beside the clues. Put these letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. (The end of a line is not necessarily the end of a word. Words end with black squares.) If your clue words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. If you can guess some of these words, put the letters into the blanks for the clues, over the appropriate numbers. This will help you to guess more words. The first letters of the correctly worked clues spell the name of the author and the title of the work from which the quotation is taken.

A. Phenylketonuria (abbrev.)
129 188 76

B. Asimov's greatest fictional scientist (two words)
183 33 165 141 61 4 100 78 37 20

C. _____ of Panama: Land feature connecting North and South America
12 197 27 119 34 150 7

D. Final sighting (two words)
178 58 140 73 163 23 102 79

E. R. Silverberg novel of telepathic pathos: DYING _____
19 152 89 25 154 60

F. Fastidious fathers (two words)
95 146 68 3 181 123 42 86

G. Actor/director notorious for dramatizing an invasion of Earth (last name)
35 173 75 144 186 8

H. Color of a middle-aged star
148 28 82 101 168 38

I. Devilish story by Zelazny
41 44 193 16 175 99 138

J. Annoying
46 59 13 94 176 17 172

K. Most frequently used name for God in the Old Testament
14 147 133 161 53 174

L. Number of Laws of Robotics
87 67 131 72 162

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M. Conducted in secrecy (two words)

110 158 128 55 80 169 26 51

N. How Asimov got back into the Foundation series

136 113 85 184 106 164 132 153

O. Satellite of Mars

10 130 143 185 105 171

P. Plunged into a liquid

194 57 142 120 96 74 187 117

Q. Recent Frederik Pohl novel

66 160 145 122 156 167 43 69 149

R. A wearing down, or decrease

91 182 159 114 2 104 127 195 84

S. City in SW Colombia

98 116 48 126 192

T. Professional boxer (slang)

5 177 54

U. Barren, or lacking in strength

32 70 62 190 118 18

V. Where Oberon chases after his fleeting sisters Titania, Umbriel, Ariel and Miranda (two words)

155 31 97 40 64 121 196 108 179 24

49 112

W. Champollion's key to hieroglyphics (two words)

29 88 170 71 56 166 125 22 90 157

47 77

X. Michael Moorcock 1972 novel, first of a series (three words)

6 45 107 11 63 139 134 36 115 135

15

Y. Essential feature of parthenogenisis (two words)

180 83 30 137 65 109 92

Z. A state of ease

50 39 124 189 81 191 1

AA. Ninth closest star system, in River constellation: Epsilon _____

9 151 93 103 21 52 111

Answer will appear in the October issue.

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CORRECTION: We apologize to our readers and to the author for a typesetting error in the story "Pattern" by Edward Wellen in the July 1984 issue, resulting in the transposition of column 2 on page 61 and column 1 on page 62. If that column is cut out, reversed and taped back in, the story will read correctly.

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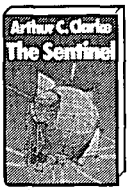

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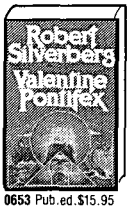

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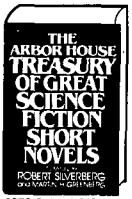

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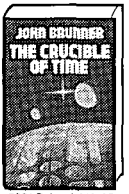

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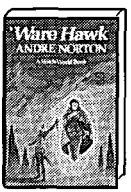

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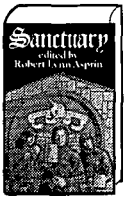

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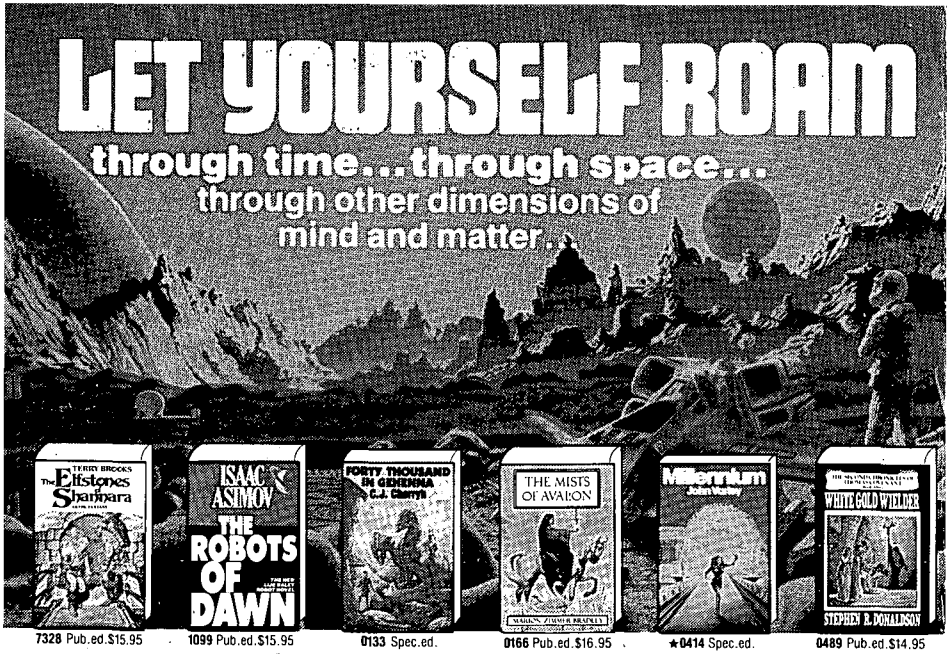

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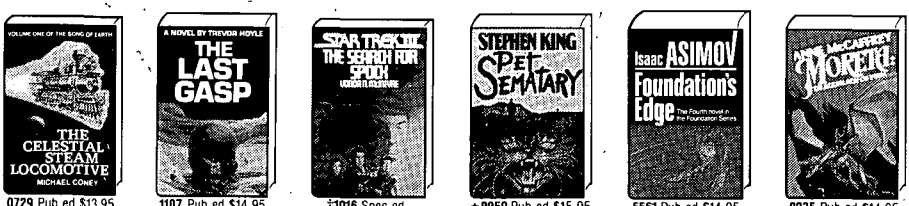

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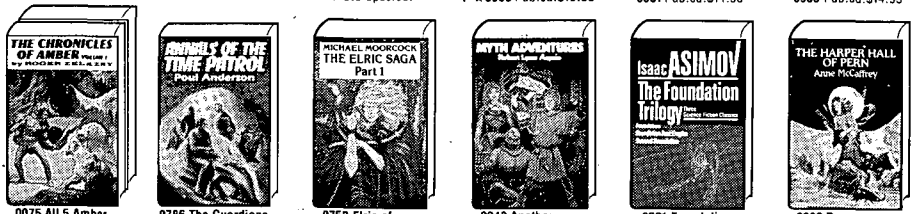

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